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"NO MORE, MABEL," EXCLAIMED MR. MEREDITH. "I WILL NOT HEAR A WORD MORE. LEAVE THIS HOUSE, YOUNG MAN!"

The Bride of an Actor; or, Driven from Home.

By the author of "Alone in the World," "Clifton," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEETING.

THE place was an old-fashioned country house up the North river, and more picturesque and home-like than it is easy to describe. A portion of the building had been erected soon after the Revolution, and that had been added on to at different periods, until it made up an

irregular structure, linked together, as it were, by balconies and broad verandas, covered with luxuriant vines that, in the summer time, made it as picturesque as an old feudal mansion.

The grounds were extensive and filled with fine old trees, leaving pleasant openings here and there, from whence glimpses of the beautiful river could be obtained. Although it was late in the autumn, the vines yet kept their leaves, in masses of rich crimson and yellow, while the garden, at the back of the house, was still bright with broad patches of color from the last autumn blossoms, where great clusters of chrysanthemums threatened to outlive the snow.

The interior of the mansion was at once quaint and stately. There were broad halls ending nowhere in particular, rooms jutting out in unexpected places, and all so cheerful and pleasant, with such an air of

stability and age, that was exceedingly agreeable to one who looked at the old place with an artistic perception.

It was a glorious morning, warm and bright, as if summer had come back to take another last look before deserting the lovely spot for so many long months.

A carriage had driven up the winding avenue, and a lady, who had descended from it, stood on the piazza, making a variety of inquiries of the old servant who had opened the door.

"And you do not know when Mr. Meredith will return?" she asked, disappointment trembling in her voice, which was widely at variance with the coldness of her face.

"I do not, ma'am; not for several days, I think."

"And you can not give me his address?"

"Miss Mabel might know it."

"Who is she?" asked the lady, quickly.

The old man looked a little surprised at her abruptness, but answered it with the courtesy of an era almost extinct:

"Mr. Meredith's daughter, madam."

"Daughter—his daughter!"

"Oh, there she comes, madam," he added, pointing down the avenue.

The lady turned sharply, and saw a young girl, mounted on a beautiful chestnut horse, dashing up the winding road. The lady stood watching her, while the man descended the steps; and indeed it was a picture that might have attracted a person even more preoccupied than she appeared.

The girl had checked her horse, and leaned toward the servant, her cheeks glowing, and her great eyes full of a soft, lambent light, that kindled her face into a beauty that was positively startling.

"Oh, Joseph," she exclaimed, "I have had a splendid ride. Flash is quite beside himself with spirits this morning."

The servant spoke a few words to her in a low tone, which made her pause and glance in surprise toward the lady who stood so intently regarding her.

She sprung lightly off her horse, before the servant could assist her, and, gathering up the folds of her riding-skirt, walked up the steps. The lady had not moved, and made no effort to come forward to meet her, nor did she return her graceful salutation. It seemed to be nothing personally connected with the young girl which moved her—only as if she wondered how any human creature could look so brilliant and light-hearted.

"Joseph tells me you wished to see papa," said the young lady, advancing toward her: "I am sorry he is not at home. Will you walk into the house?"

The lady followed her in silence, and they entered a little reception-room off the hall.

"I can not tell when he will be home," continued the girl, blushing a little at the stranger's continued scrutiny.

These words seemed to recall the lady to herself, and she said, in the same peculiar voice:

"I wished very much to see him. Do you know his address?"

"Indeed, I do not; I send my letters to the address of his partners; he is at some hotel in the city."

"Can you give me his partners' place of business?"

The girl gave it.

"Let me write it down," she said. "Pray be seated, madam, while I find a pencil."

The lady sat down, still watching the girl while she looked about for the writing materials, which had been mislaid with the usual heedlessness of a young person.

"I am sorry to have had to search so long," she said, handing the stranger the card on which she had written the address, with another blush and a bright smile. "I am a careless creature."

The lady took the paper, and again her eyes met those of her hostess with the same wistful expression.

"What is your name?" she asked, suddenly.

"Mabel Meredith," she replied.

"I thought Mr. Meredith had only a son."

The girl colored more vividly than before.

"He died many years ago, madam."

"Have you been living here a long time?"

"Except when I have been at school."

She answered the questions simply; there was something in the lady's manner which precluded the possibility of taking offense.

"And you are now how old?"

"Eighteen—at least I shall be in a few days."

"Eighteen!" murmured the woman. "It's a long way back—a long way back."

"You look very tired," Mabel said, noticing how the white lids drooped over the weary eyes; "won't you lay off your shawl and take luncheon with me?"

"I am not tired," she answered, almost impatiently. "How do you pass your life?" she added.

"Indeed, I can hardly tell you. I fear I am really idle, but I am very, very happy."

"O, yes; you live in dreams yet. Not quite eighteen—it's a whole life back."

She spoke those last words to herself, but Mabel caught their import, and looked at her in astonishment.

"I fear you are not quite well," she said. "I wish I could persuade you to rest before going away."

"When you have lived eighteen years more you will, perhaps, know that there is no such word as rest," returned the stranger.

Mabel's quick fancy was excited by the lady's strange manner and speech, and she was too much of a visionary not to give way at once to the train of thought called up.

"I thought by that time people wanted to rest," she said; "that they were tired of excitement and longed to be quiet."

The woman smiled bitterly.

"And is that any reason for finding it?" she asked. "Child, when that day comes you will learn that it is no more answered than a prayer for death."

"Is life so hard?" Mabel asked, wonderingly. "I have read so—I know that people are unhappy. Sometimes I almost wish for a great trouble, to take me out of my dreams."

"What sort of dreams?" she questioned.

"I hardly know. I am restless without reason. I am very happy, but I am often sad without knowing why."

"The old story," sighed the lady. "Keep to your dreams, child; they are better than life, far better than any thing you will find in the hereafter."

She turned her proud face away and folded her shawl about her, in preparation for her departure.

"Who shall I tell papa called to see him?" asked Mabel.

"It is no matter; I may find him in town; I am going there at once."

"There will be no train along for an hour," Mabel said. "I beg you will wait here instead of driving over to the station."

The lady threw off her shawl again with the same listless manner.

"You sing," she said, with a return of her former abruptness; "will you let me hear you?"

"Certainly; but how did you know?"

"By your face, of course! Sing me one of your happy girl's songs."

Mabel seated herself at the piano without hesitation, and sang a charming old ballad that was a favorite with her father. Her face was turned from the woman—she could not see how those pale features contracted and then softened under the influence of her fresh young voice, and the exquisite melody of the song.

Once the woman threw out her hands with an appealing gesture, as if to check the sweet sounds, then they fell heavily into her lap, and she leaned back in her chair, motionless as before.

"My father likes that song," Mabel said, turning from the instrument; "that is why I chose it."

"He likes it?" repeated the woman. "I heard that years ago. It is an old-fashioned melody. How came you to sing it to-day?"

"I am sorry if it has pained you," replied Mabel, timidly.

"A little more or less does not signify," returned the woman. "I thank you very much. I should like to see the house, if you are willing," she said, after a pause. "It is a noble old place."

Mabel caught at the idea with satisfaction; she was beginning to be embarrassed and troubled.

They went about from room to room, and Mabel noticed that the lady seemed to be familiar with the apartments, but with that rare delicacy which made a portion of her character, she asked no questions.

In the library, the woman paused for a long time, walking up and down before an oval window, filled with plants. She trod softly, and with an anxious look, as one might walk near the grave of a beloved friend.

"Do you like these rooms?" she asked.

"Very much," replied Mabel, "but papa seldom comes here."

"Why not?"

"I don't know; it is not quite so light and cheerful as the others—perhaps that is the reason."

Again the woman smiled—smiled as some stern warrior of old might have done in his dying agonies.

"Come out into the grounds, the air of this room is stifling," she said, with a struggle.

Mabel opened the window, and they descended the steps. The lady glanced toward a summer-house at the end of the walk they had entered.

"Let us go back!" she said, hoarsely; "come back, I say!"

She seemed conscious of her strange manner, and made an effort to control it.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "but I am cold—the ground is damp, I think."

She was trembling from head to foot, and did indeed seem perishing of cold. Mabel led the way back to the reception-room, and the two sat down before the fire.

"I have been here an hour," said the lady, glancing at the clock; "I will go now."

"I hope you will come again," Mabel said, feeling a strange longing to talk with her singular guest.

"Come here again!" she repeated. "It is not likely."

"Then I shall never see you. The thought makes me sad. I don't know why, but it does."

"Who can tell? You will not spend your life here—people always meet, especially when it gives them pain."

"I hope we shall not part forever now," returned the girl, earnestly; "indeed I do."

"You hope so? Thank you, child, thank you! What will happen before then—where will your dreams be—and the happy songs, and the glad smile, I wonder?"

"Do you think all people must be unhappy?" Mabel asked.

"When we meet again you shall answer that question yourself," said the woman; "cling fast to your happiness—it will loosen from your grasp every day now."

There was something inexpressibly pathetic in her tone, which brought the tears to Mabel's eyes.

"And you cry," said the woman. "While that power is left, never call yourself unhappy. Good-bye now—I am going away."

These last words were not addressed to Mabel—the girl knew that by the way her mournful eyes wandered about the room.

She extended her hand—the lady took it. Some inexplicable feeling seized Mabel—she pressed her lips upon the beautiful fingers, in pity for a suffering which she could feel, but not understand.

"Good-bye," she said; "I hope we shall meet again."

The lady murmured some unintelligible words, looked again in her face with that wondering, wistful look, then, without any other farewell, passed out of the room and the house.

Mabel followed her to the outer door, and stood watching her as she entered the carriage. Once more their eyes met—it seemed as if the stranger would have spoken, but the horses started off, and Mabel only caught the sorrowful glance.

She turned back into the house, oppressed and troubled, as if a heavy cloud had suddenly come between her and the bright day which, an hour before, had filled her heart with such animation and gladness.

CHAPTER II.

THE APPARITIONS.

It was a private parlor in a quiet hotel; so comfortable and home-like that one would easily have forgotten the Wandering Jew sort of feeling impressionable people are wont to experience in such places.

Although the dusk was gathering heavily around him, the occupant of the room had not called for lights, but sat over the smoldering fire, as he had been doing for more than an hour.

He was a man past middle age, and occasionally, when a sudden gleam shot up from the dying embers, it exposed a worn, pale face, which had evidently grown hard from the effects of long-concealed trouble.

Gradually the fire died out, and the room darkened; but the man did not stir. Twice a servant had tapped at the door; but the summons remained unanswered—he had not even heard the sound. He was a man to whom such utter prostration of will was uncommon; but that night so many memories had taken possession of him that he could not break from their hold, and after the first struggle he had yielded passively to their sway, consoling his pride with the reflection that there was no human eye near to observe and speculate upon his weakness.

That iron pride had been the ruling principle of Anson Meredith's life—it had stood between him and all that would have made the happiness of his early years—it had made him sacrifice the best hopes of his later existence. It was his bane now. He was not lamenting these as he sat there, in that gathering gloom. He was a disappointed, heart-sore man; but he did not blame himself for the trouble which had come upon him. There was no softening in his heart. Twelve years before he had given his decision in a case that might have made any father's heart tremble, and never once since that time had he wavered in the resolution which had shaped his loveless life. Even that night it was not feelings of weakness or self-reproach which bound him; he was only reviewing the past as one walks among the graves of his kindred—he would not have changed any thing, or given life to those phantoms of past affections if it had been in his power.

A clock on the mantle struck eight, but the sound did not arouse him. The room was very dark now, only the outlines of his figure could be distinguished by the dull light of the street-lamp, which quivered against the window.

There was a step in the hall, an impatient knock, when the door was thrown quickly open, and some one cried out:

"I can't stand knocking here—I am tired out. The deuce! The room is like a dungeon! I say, Markham, are you asleep?"

Mr. Meredith started to his feet suddenly, as if some one had dealt him a blow; he stood for a moment gathering his faculties, like a man rudely wakened from an unpleasant dream.

"Confound you, Markham!" exclaimed the intruder, closing the door and stumbling about among the furniture; "can't you speak?—I can just make you out moping over the fireplace. I'll rouse you up, or we'll know the reason why!"

"You have made a mistake in the room, sir," said Meredith, quivering from head to foot, he scarcely knew why, and resenting this intrusion, although it was evidently unintentional.

"Well, I like that!" returned the stranger. "If you want to cheat me, you mustn't speak in your natural voice—you're a poor actor, my boy."

"You are in error, sir," resumed Meredith, sternly; "the person you are looking for is not here."

"Just wait till I can get this door open again, so as to have some light, and I'll teach you to play these shabby tricks on me, old boy," exclaimed the other, laughing in a peculiar, reckless way.

There was something in that sudden merriment which startled Meredith again—he shrunk within himself, smitten by a sudden realization that the intruder was known to him!

"Who are you?" he cried out, quickly. "What do you want here?"

His voice had grown heavy and hoarse, as he made a step forward to open the door.

A broken exclamation died on the stranger's lips.

"I believe I have made a mistake," he said. "I beg you to excuse it, sir—but it's very dist—ridiculous, I mean," and he laughed out again in spite of his efforts to be grave.

"Open that door!" exclaimed Mr. Meredith, in a hurried, excited manner, which those who knew him best would not have recognized as belonging to that cold, self-possessed man. "Who are you? I will know!"

"C. Montgomery, at your service," returned the

other. "As for the door, I will open it with pleasure, when I can find the knob."

As he spoke, the young man threw the door open, and stood in the entrance.

"I have already explained, and apologized for my intrusion," he said, haughtily.

Mr. Meredith moved toward the door. As he did so, the stranger turned, and the gas-light from the hall fell full upon their faces. For an instant both stood in silence, the elder man breathing heavily, and struggling with himself—the younger with the smile still upon his face, and an apparent determination to have out the scene with unconcern which cost him terrible pain to assume.

"How dare you come here?" exclaimed Mr. Meredith. "How dare you?"

"I have already told you that I entered by mistake."

"I do not believe it. You meant to intrude on me. If it ever happens again I will see that the laws protect me."

"Do not threaten me or I may forget myself, sir. I have no desire to cross your path. I have not forgotten—I have not forgotten!"

"I do not know you," interrupted Mr. Meredith, recovering his composure, and speaking with icy deliberation. "I speak as I should to any stranger who had conducted himself as you have been doing to-night."

"I came here, sir, by mistake; I have apologized. Your insulting language does not disturb me, and never shall."

"Unchanged!" muttered Mr. Meredith. "Unchanged!"

"Yes, sir, unchanged; except that, like yourself, I have grown harder and more unforgiving."

"More reckless and wicked, you should say," Meredith returned, bitterly.

"So be it; call it by any name you please—we both know whom to thank for the cause."

"Your own evil disposition and heartless nature."

The young man clenched the hand that hung at his side, but restraining himself by a violent effort, he spoke again as if determined to irritate the other by his calmness:

"This little interchange of harsh words can do no good," he said; "with your permission I will retire."

"Go, and remember what I have said! You must not again insult me by your presence—if it happens, I will treat you as you deserve."

"Twelve years ago I told you that no threats could terrify me. I am not likely to have grown weaker since. I trust that we may never meet again. If we do, it will not be my fault. I leave you to all the pleasant reflections which must possess you, and I go back to the life you have made for me."

"You made it for yourself—when the bad ending comes, remember that."

"I shall remember, as will you—those who have to judge will know where the blame lies."

He turned from the door—paused an instant, and the two men looked full at each other, the one hard as iron, the other with a proud, defiant expression, which gave his handsome face the look of a fierce, wronged spirit determined to resist and struggle to the last.

"Go!" repeated Mr. Meredith; "go!"

The young man walked deliberately across the hall and disappeared down the staircase, turning once more to give back that look of stern defiance. When the sound of his footsteps had died, Mr. Meredith staggered back against the wall, cold and white as if exhausted by some violent physical effort.

"The last time!" he said, in a low but fully distinct tone. "I have only seen a ghost—the shadow came before him."

As he spoke these words, a hand was laid upon his arm and a voice whispered:

"Will it grieve you to see another, Anson Meredith?"

He was so overcome by the emotion of that interview that he did not even start—he raised his eyes and saw that a woman stood before him, looking into his face with an expression of yearning sadness that might have touched a heart of stone.

"You too!" he muttered, looking down into the eyes lifted toward him with such eloquent appeal; "you here?"

"I am here, in the same land with you—how could I help it?"

She had entered the hall just as Montgomery disappeared, and stood for an instant watching Mr. Meredith, when he gave way to that strange weakness.

The man's face changed as he looked upon her; his eye brightened, his lips began to close tenderly. He entered his room and motioned her to follow, lighted the chandelier and placed a chair for her in silence. Deep feeling held him mute.

"You did not expect me," she said.

"I don't know," he answered, vaguely; "it would not surprise me to see the dead themselves come up to-night. But the dark spirit is driven away, and you are come. I am thankful."

"Have they haunted you?" she asked, in a sort of wonder.

"These spirits have been about me so many years that their faces are more familiar than living creatures can be."

She rose from the chair in which she had seated herself, and walked several times up and down the room, clasping her hands hard together, and gradually bringing her face back to its forced calm.

She was a woman of middle age, but the face was beautiful still, only so pale and sad that it might have belonged to a statue. Still, the unquiet glitter of her eyes betrayed the inward fever of a soul in painful unrest.

"I came to see you," she said, suddenly returning to her chair, and sitting down with her face partially turned from him.

Mr. Meredith did not speak, and after these words she was silent for several moments. Her hands drooped slowly into her lap in a way which indicated the attitude was an habitual one; her eyes looked straight toward the expiring fire, and she seemed, for the instant, to forget that she was not alone.

"Ashes," she muttered; "nothing left but ashes."

She was thinking of her life—one could see that, by the mist that stole over her restless eyes, the mouth quivering slightly, then growing still. But for that you might have thought her sadly moralizing over the white ashes at her feet.

"You came to see me," Mr. Meredith said, after watching her in silence. "Can I aid you in any thing?"

She did not look toward him, but bowed her head slightly.

"I don't wonder it surprised you—I feel as if we had met in another world."

"It is another world," he said, slowly.

"Yes, and I am only a poor, hunted spirit, that has strayed out of the old one—your own thought, you know. I shall not trouble you long. I don't know why I came—I want no help—you could not give it to me, if I did—I wanted to see somebody that belonged to the past."

"Has any new trouble overtaken you?" he asked, kindly.

"You know I would help you, if I could."

"Never mind, never mind! We each agreed to bury our own dead—that's a good many years ago, Anson Meredith."

"I cannot bear this to-night," he said, and his voice shook a little; "I have been greatly disturbed."

"Who left you as I crossed the hall?" she asked, abruptly.

He shrank from her question, and put out his hand.

"Don't talk of it—you heard me say I had seen a ghost. One never trembles at the sight of a ghost, unless it is the shadow of something once very dear."

"And I came just after! I have been looking for you several days—I did not know that you were here until this moment. I came to this hotel this afternoon, and heard your voice by accident—now I will go away."

"When are you going?"

"To-night, probably. I have found you. I only wanted to say one thing to you—I don't know why; you can't help me."

"What is it, Eleanor?"

"The old name—I haven't heard it in so long—don't call me that again. It is like striking a blow at a tombstone."

She threw herself back in her chair, and moaned with a passion so at variance with her former sad tenderness that it was painful as a death-cry.

"Tell me why you come here so suddenly," he said again.

She rose to her feet, stretched out her hand, and half whispered:

"I come because my child—his child—is alive."

Meredith started from his chair, and they stood looking at each other with a sort of vague fear, the woman repeating several times:

"It did not die; it did not die. God has been very merciful or very cruel to me, but my child is alive—I am searching for it. That bad man who has gone to his last account, has left no trace but the single fact that my child is alive."

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST.

"And you can give me no assistance?"

"Indeed, madam, I do not know which way to turn I am astonished beyond measure by your revelation."

"Never mind that—I want advice."

"Can you think of no person who would be likely to know any thing about the matter?"

"One old woman—Margaret Hawkins; but she may be dead, now."

"I do not remember her."

"No?"

"You have no clew toward finding her, if she be dead?"

"Not the slightest. It is years since I have been in this country. I have only just arrived now."

"We can advertise for her, Mrs. Mitchell; it is our only hope."

"And if we hear nothing?"

"Let us hope for the best—it is all we can do now at any rate. I will think this over to-night, and attend to the advertisement."

The lady rose from the office chair where she had been sitting, and stood before the old lawyer.

"Mr. Meredith," she said, "I have no home, no name, no friend, unless I may call you one—"

"I have always been that," he interrupted.

"Yes, you were kind to me even then; how you worked to save me," she said. "I need not tell you what my life has been for these long years. Weaker women would have died, or gone mad—I could do neither. Think what it must be to me, after all this time, to hear that my child is alive—alive, and I can find no trace of it."

The woman's voice rose to a wail; for an instant it seemed as if all her wonderful self-control must desert her, but she conquered the spasm, and again seated herself.

"And all you know is contained in this unfinished letter—"

"Everything! I met this Mrs. Eastman in Italy; I did her a service. I suppose she had heard my story. She sent me a note and a package of unimportant papers that belonged to him saving that—"

ter her husband's death, she had found them among his documents. You know he was Mitchell's executor. I did not look at them. I locked up the package, and it was only a few weeks since that I opened it. I cannot tell what impelled me. I shrink from all allusion to the past, more and more, every year. I found this torn letter in his writing. I don't know for whom it was meant, but it said that my child had not died—but that I never should know it, never see it again."

She broke off with a dry sob, more painful than tears. Mr. Meredith looked at her, and, worldly man as he was, accustomed to scenes of grief and all manner of exhibitions of feeling, his heart was touched.

"You have been a most unfortunate woman," he said.

"It is too late to think of that, now," she answered.

"Part of that terrible past was of my own causing, but of the sin and shame they heaped upon me, I was innocent."

"Many people always believed that," he said, soothingly.

"Who believed it?" she exclaimed; "you, perhaps—the man who knew my innocence—but who beside you two? A woman who is accused is disgraced. Civilization has no mercy. My worst enemies were women; how they hated me! I feel their sneers burning in my heart yet."

She broke off with a shudder, but when she spoke again, her voice had taken a deeper tone of anguish.

"I was a woman, and all that suffering I had to bear alone! I was afraid to face the light of day, lest I should meet familiar eyes whose coldness would remind me of my shame. During all these years I have had no human being to care for. I had steeled my heart into quiet, and now there comes the tidings that my child was then alive."

"You must be courageous, now," he said, kindly: "think how nobly you have borne—"

"I was desperate, then—sullenly content—I had no hope. But now—my child—all that time my child was living!"

It was a hard task, but he must remind her of the time that had elapsed since that letter was written.

"I would not willingly pain you," he said, "you know that, but I must warn you against too much hope."

"You need not—I know how mad it is. The child may have died after—I see what you mean. Have I not thought of that? But suppose she lives, and I find her! I must tell her of the cloud that has blackened my name for years; that I have lived an outcast, deserted by my friends, disowned by my kindred! Could she come back to a mother like that?"

"She would believe you—others will do so now. Indeed, Mrs. Mitchell, long since I would have advised you to return to this country. People have half forgotten that time of trial; many will believe you now."

"And pity me!" she cried. "No, not that. I have borne everything else—not that! If to-morrow I could call back those false friends, I would not do it. I do not say this bitterly, but I want rest, rest. The sight of them would be like living over those terrible years again."

"I can understand that, in a measure."

"Don't talk of it," she broke in; "you mean kindly, but it is like the thrust of a dagger."

She said it so quietly, but with such a rush of agony under the ice of her voice, that it was more painful to witness than an outburst of despair.

"Shall you stay in New York?" asked the lawyer, after a pause, during which he was seeking for some words with which to break the silence.

"For the present, to see if we hear from this advertisement. Spare no efforts; try every newspaper in the country. At least, I have money."

"That has ever been a sort of consolation to me," he cried.

"Sometimes I was sorry for it," she said, with a sudden fire: "I wished that I had been poor. Hard, biting poverty and labor would have kept me from thought."

"You have traveled a good deal?" he asked, more from not knowing what to say, than for any other reason.

"I have been everywhere. I have had no rest—no home. The moment I reached one place, I was wild to leave it. Often and often have I spent days and nights in journeys without aim—hurrying or only because constant motion was the only relief I could find."

"But you must have made friends."

"If I dared, the story of my disgrace was sure to follow. Could I feel myself in a position to be scorned and cast aside? Sometimes I found some poor wretch even more unfortunate than I. I could help her as far as money went, but where was I to learn words of comfort to give?"

"Poor, poor Eleanor!"

The old lawyer said the words unconsciously, not thinking of the present, but looking back into the past, years ago, when he saw that lone woman a bright, happy girl, whose future seemed full of joy and brilliance. It was difficult to realize that the worn, pale woman, with the spent agony of such a terrible suffering always present in her face, could be the same.

"I know what you are thinking," she said; "it does not seem possible! I feel as if that young person had died, and I was her ghost, doomed to wander through an eternity of pain."

"Heaven is over all," he whispered.

"Ay," she said, bitterly, "and far off it is! God forgive me, but I have grown so hard that sometimes I doubted His mercy. I felt as if I were alone in the world."

THE BRIDE OF AN ACTOR.

"Where can I find it? This news has kindled the old fire in my heart. When I think that my child may be alive—oh, help me, do help me!"

All her self-control gave way; she dropped her head upon the table with a passionate burst of dry, hard sobs. Even then she had no tears. When he made an effort to console her, she quieted herself, and again looked up.

"I know," she said; "patience, resignation; I know. I will go away, now. I do not often give way like this. I never did before, except in solitude."

"I will come and see you to-morrow."

"And you will think—you will devise means—you are so wise, so clear-sighted."

"All that is in the power of man to do, shall be done, Eleanor. I promise you that."

"And I believe you. Good-by."

She drew down her veil and hurried out of the office, so shaken that even her habits of endurance could not longer support her in that agony.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

MABEL MEREDITH found her home brightened by a subject of thought after the visit of her strange guest. It was singular how completely the face of that woman possessed her memory—how the sound of her voice stole through the day-dreams in which every new event was woven. Mr. Meredith had not yet returned from the city, and the fair girl had given the time of his absence up to dashing rides in the morning, and tender reveries as the night drew on.

She was seated one evening in a pleasant apartment, on the ground floor which opened out of the library, lost in one of these vague, bright dreams. She was leaning back in an easy-chair, her head supported on her hand, and her eyes wandering slowly about, as if following the course of the golden sunbeams.

She had nothing to do but dream. The sun which ripens the pomegranates in a Southern zone is not more fervid than her nature; yet, with all, there was a winning gentleness about her which won every heart—a wild outpouring of affection toward those whom she loved, which rendered her very faults lovable. The elements of a noble soul were there, but unformed and orderless as the treasures of some volcanic isle. Thus organized, her solitude was all dreams. She was dreaming as she sat there then. One saw it in the far-off look in her eyes, the smiling, visionary sadness which dimpled her beautiful mouth.

The door that led into the hall was quietly opened, and Mr. Meredith entered the apartment. His step! Mabel sprung up—the dreamy expression died from her features, and they kindled into girlish joyfulness.

"Papa!" she exclaimed, going forward to meet him, and throwing her arm about his neck with a movement full of grace; "I am so glad you have come back. How could you stay away so long? I have half a mind to punish you dreadfully!"

"What shall it be, Mabel?" he returned, with the stately pleasantness habitual to him; "come, decide."

"This!" she said, laughingly, raising her face to his, and pressing a shower of kisses upon it. "There, I think you have sufficiently atoned for your fault! Sit down now, and tell me what you have been doing."

She forced him gently into the chair she had left, and sinking to a footstool at his feet, clasped her hands over his knee with a childish grace which was inexpressibly beautiful, and made one of the chief charms of her changeable manner.

Mr. Meredith looked smilingly down upon her; his cold face brightened, and every glance told how closely that young creature had twined herself about his affections.

"What have you been doing, Mabel?" he asked.

"I hardly know, papa; I fear almost nothing at all, though I have been busy every moment."

"A satisfactory account, certainly! You must have a decided genius for doing nothing if you can occupy yourself day after day by the means."

"You are laughing at me, are you? Well, papa, I have been busy. I read a little, practiced, walked, played with the dog, and then—"

"What then?"

"I was thinking—"

"Indeed! You must have been at a loss for employment, if you were forced to think—really, I pity you. Truly, what were you thinking about?"

"I wasn't thinking of any thing—"

"Of some person, then?"

"Yes."

Even in his playfulness, the worn man looked uneasy; he had so guarded his dove in his inmost heart that the bare idea of her seeking other shelter would have been terrible to him.

"Of whom were you thinking?" he said, a little quickly.

"You won't be angry if I tell you?"

"Am I ever angry with you?"

"No, no, I will do you justice there! Well, then, if I must tell you—"

"Now for this weighty secret!"

"It was of—yourself!" she said, with a joyous laugh, and flinging her arms again about his neck, she forced him, by her childish gayety, to merriment such as he seldom indulged in. "Are you satisfied now, papa?"

"I am satisfied that you are a darling!"

"Nothing more than that? How commonplace!"

"Why not call me witch or fairy?"

"You are grown too tall to be a fairy, but you cer-

"If my spells can hold you enthralled, I shall be content," she replied, gayly. "But I don't like that word; it always reminds me of those poor Salem wretches that Miss Granger used to make me read about. How stupid it was!"

"What name would please you?"

"Oh, I like the one you gave me long ago; it is mine by right. I am your princess, you know!"

"And a very tyrannical one, too."

"But is the tyranny unpleasant?"

"Would I dare acknowledge it? You are too absolute for that."

"How gay you are to-night, papa! I hardly recognize you! I know that you have been thinking of something very pleasant, which you are dying to tell me, so don't keep me in suspense!"

"Ah, my princess, it is my turn to play the tyrant."

"But you haven't the heart; then, too, you would be punishing yourself almost as much as you would me, by keeping your secret."

"Do you ever get lonely here, Mabel?" he asked, suddenly, and with more of his customary gravity. "Lonely, papa?"

"Yes; you need not be afraid to tell me. If it were so, it would only be natural."

"I could never be lonely where you were, papa," she replied, unhesitatingly; "but sometimes, when you are absent, I do so long for your return!"

He drew her toward him in silence; there was a tenderness in her half-playful manner which touched him.

"Since Miss Granger left us I have no companion, you know, when you are out of the house."

"True, my child! But have you heard lately from Miss Granger?"

"Not long since. She is with her brother in Mississippi, taking care of his children—that is her proper element; and there, doubtless, she will remain to the end of the chapter, unless some good-natured planter be smitten by her. But tell me, why do you ask all these questions?"

"Because I felt how lonely it must be for you here. I am not a very lively companion—"

"Now, papa, don't slander yourself; I will not hear it. Do go on."

"I wish to devise some means by which you may have more society, more pleasure."

"Don't tell me you think of procuring me a companion—I detest the very name! I have read novels enough to know all about the race. Why, she would make me the confidant of more love affairs than ever you dreamed of, and persuade me that the first handsome coachman we saw was a prince in disguise! No, no, thank you, I am very well as I am."

"But that is not what I meant. Would you like to go down to the city and spend the winter? It is time for you to see something of society and the world."

"Papa, are you in earnest?"

"Of course. Would you like it?"

She clapped her hands, with the ringing laugh of childhood.

"Should I like it? Did I like sugar-plums when I was a little girl?"

"To my certain knowledge you did, miss; and I suppose you would like the sugar-plums society has to offer in the shape of compliments and adoration."

"Will I receive them, papa?"

"I fancy there could not be two opinions upon that subject," returned he, almost proudly. "I imagine that a child of mine would not be entirely neglected in the crowd, especially when she has a face like this."

"Don't flatter, papa. But won't they take me for a savage, I know so little of the world?"

"A savage! You, my princess!"

"Very true! But then you know there are princesses in the South Sea Islands."

"At all events, they will find you a regular cannibal where hearts are concerned."

"But, seriously, papa, are we to go to New York for the winter?"

"If you like the idea. I have a house there vacant. Every thing can be made ready in a week."

"But shall you like it, papa?"

"Whatever makes you happy must always be agreeable to me, my child. You will find it very pleasant, I hope; as for me—"

"You do not finish."

"When you have reached my age, you will learn that contentment is about all one hopes for."

"I do not like the quiet of contentment; it seems dull and stupid. I like excitement. I think I should enjoy society."

"It is but natural at your age," he replied, absently. His thoughts had gone where hers could not follow—back into the past, that past of which he never spoke to any human being. But there are moments in the lives of the proudest and the sternest, when memory—that officious herald, will obtrude itself, and there is no escape from its bitter reproaches.

"You are growing silent," Mabel said, after a pause; "are you tired?"

"A little, but it will soon pass. Then you are pleased with the arrangement I propose?"

She kissed his hand with a humility of affection unusual to her, murmuring softly:

"You are very kind to me, papa, very kind."

"You deserve it all," he replied, "all, my good child."

"If I do vex you sometimes," she said, playfully.

"That one can pardon, you atone for it so willingly."

"Good, kind papa!"

He stooped down and kissed her forehead, while a gentle expression stole over his features.

He left her to her youthful dreams of coming happiness—left her to seek the solitude of his chamber, where, upon the threshold, met him ever those phantoms of a shattered life, which haunt the pathway of him to whom Fate has denied the chief of human blessings—peace.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT CAME OF A BOUQUET.

It was an apartment in a fashionable hotel fronting on Broadway. The glow of a warm sun brightened the curtains, which were gathered carelessly back from the casements in heavy folds, and cast a rich glow over the breakfast table, where a young man was seated.

Notwithstanding his great personal beauty, there was in the face of the young man a worn look, which gave an idea of more unsettled habits than was really the case. But late hours, constant excitement, had left traces on his features which would have been remarked by a refined person with regret.

The room in which he sat partook of the unrest revealed in his features—every thing was rich and profuse, but crowded together in wild confusion. Books, cigar-cases, fencing-foils and boxing-gloves were huddled together upon the tables, or scattered over the floor; under the sofa was a delicately embroidered slipper, the mate of which had perhaps been left in some similar room a hundred miles away, and beside it a pile of soiled gloves of every tint, some mateless and others in tatters, as if they had been torn from the hand in haste or passion. In short, all around him was costly, luxurious and particularly uncomfortable; but he sat in the midst of this confusion as if it were his natural element, though every thing about his person was spotless in its purity.

The dark curls which clustered about his forehead had been flung carelessly back by some impatient movement of the hand; his dressing-gown, of crimson silk, damasked with gorgeous flowers, was draped carelessly about his form, the heavy cord which should have confined it at his waist partially torn away and trailing over his chair. His mood seemed each instant to change; now his manner was listless and languid—he leaned back in his chair, stirring with his spoon the foam on the cup of chocolate beside him; then some sudden thought would rouse him, and a look almost of tender regret would pass over his features, to be in turn succeeded by a dissatisfied, impatient expression, painful to witness. Nor did it seem that it was any unwonted emotion which caused this state of feeling, but the changeable manner natural to his character.

As he sat there, a servant entered noiselessly, and, seeing his master lost in thought, began quietly to arrange the furniture, and create a little order amid that luxurious confusion. He was interrupted in his task by a sudden call from the young man:

"What are you doing there, Henry?"

"Putting things to rights a little, sir," replied the man.

His master caught up a boxing-glove which lay at his feet, and flinging it with well-directed aim at the servant's head, said, laughingly:

"Be off, or you will need setting to rights yourself. Bring me a cigar, stupid—you knew I wanted one."

The man bowed and went out as noiselessly as he had entered, evidently too much accustomed to such scenes to feel any astonishment. In a few moments he returned, bearing in his hand a bouquet of flowers, which pervaded the whole room with their fragrance. He presented it in silence to his master, who made no movement to receive it, but turned half away with a gesture of impatience.

"What do you bring those here for?" he said; "you know I hate flowers in the morning. I shall be under the necessity of breaking your skull, my fine fellow, if you don't quit bringing me these things."

"But they are left for you, sir," expostulated the servant.

"Put your foot on them in the anteroom; go and see on your own account the fair ones who send them—do what you like, but don't bore me."

"I think there's a note tied to the ribbon, sir."

"Read it, and be hanged to you. Answer it, too, if you like."

"The flowers are very pretty, sir; it seems as if they spelled a name."

"Give them here, you fool. You are never satisfied unless you can make me do something unpleasant."

He held out his hand listlessly, and took the bouquet.

"Come, that's rather pretty," he said, with a yawn, "but the perfume's too strong. It does spell a name, I believe. E—s—Estelle. I would wonder who that is, only it's too much trouble."

There was a tiny note thrust in among the blossoms; he took it, tore it open, and glanced carelessly over it.

"You have forgotten an old acquaintance. These poor flowers will tell you her name, their bearer her address, which you will forget, if you do not follow him before to-morrow."

"Very prettily worded," he said, glancing again at the flowers, "but the idea is not original. Here, take them away," he added, flinging the bouquet carelessly down. "Who brought them, Henry?"

"A servant, sir."

"Well, ask him the lady's address, and any thing else you please."

When he was gone, the young man sunk back in his former careless attitude, and did not even look up when the domestic returned.

"There is her address, sir; I wrote it down, but the lady's name he pretended not to know."

"Who cares? Get along with you and bring me that cigar."

The servant brought a package of Havanas upon a silver salver, and placed them, together with a small lamp of antique workmanship, upon the table by his master's side. The young man selected one of the cigars, twisted up the perfumed note which he held in his hand, thrust it into the flame, and kindled his cigar with it, then allowed it to fall upon the carpet and writhe itself to ashes.

An hour after, he summoned the domestic again, pushing carelessly aside a pile of cards, notes and letters, which had lain since the preceding day disregarded on the table.

"Get my things ready, Henry; I am going out," he said, rising, and flinging the end of his cigar down among the papers. "Hurry yourself, for it's getting late."

When he was dressed he left the chamber, and descended into the street, sauntering carelessly along, and replying with nonchalant grace to the greetings from acquaintances as he passed. He entered a hotel near one of the upper parks, and giving his card to a servant, said, with a fatigued sort of smile which the man did not observe:

"Take that to No. 13."

In a moment the servant returned and motioned him to ascend the stairs. He flung open a door upon the upper landing, and ushered the young man into a handsomely-shaded parlor, from whence a curtained recess gave entrance to a small boudoir.

A lady, seated in the inner room, half rose as the stranger paused upon the threshold. A slight blush came to her cheek, a triumphant flush to her eyes. She moved forward a step as he advanced, extending her hand, and saying, in a low voice, which seemed tremulous from hidden feeling:

"You appear, Mr. Montgomery, to have forgotten an old acquaintance; pardon my having troubled you to come here."

He bowed over the delicate hand with easy gallantry, while his eyes wandered furtively over the speaker's elegant form.

"You mistake," he said. "Had I known that you were in town, I should have ventured to pay my respects before now; yet I am glad that I did not; it would have deprived me of the happiness of receiving your note."

The lady motioned him to a seat beside the low chair into which she had sunk.

"You have not forgotten how to flatter," she replied. "I thought it was the atmosphere of Paris which inspired you formerly, but now I perceive it was genius, nothing less."

"The same inspiration—your beauty," he said, kissing her hand again, while across his face passed an expression which might have revealed that he was endeavoring to recall some confused memory. His quick eye caught the name engraved upon the cover of a volume which lay beside her, and the doubtful look forsook his eyes, leaving only a gleam of gratified vanity in their depths.

"You know well, Mrs. Eastman, that the mortal who has been blessed with the sight of an angel has lost the power of forgetfulness."

"Poetical as ever!" she exclaimed with an assumed laugh. "But you know I never did believe you. Tell me, what did you think when you saw the flowers, and what did you do with my silly note?"

"I thought a new Eve had sent me a cluster of blossoms from her Paradise; the note I laid next the heart which had become the shrine of a blessed memory."

"During two whole years! What folly! You have been too much occupied since then; the laurels which were budding for you have sprung to full blossom."

"But it was the sunlight of your smile which fostered them," he said. "Is it only two years since I saw you? It has seemed to me a century."

"I have heard of you continually—everywhere flattered, caressed. Oh, how delightful to be famous!"

"I never thought so until your lips repeated the word; henceforth, fame will be sweet to me."

"If one ever knew when you were in earnest," she said, shaking her finger playfully at him; "but you have such a torrent of pretty words at your command that it is impossible to know what your real thought is."

"'Tis figured on my tongue," he said, laughing at his own quotation, yet with apparent earnestness in his voice.

"I fear me both are false," she continued, laughing in turn.

"Then never man was true," he murmured, taking her hand in his.

"I don't think I ever can believe you," she said, without attempting to withdraw her hand, but endeavoring by her manner to lead the conversation back to its former playful tone. "Don't make any rash vows, for you will be sure to break them."

"I can not deny that, for I made one long since which I found myself unable to keep."

"And that?"

"To forswear your presence—it is too dangerous."

"What a thing to tell a lady; where is your gallantry?"

"If a man were blinding himself by looking at the sun, would you not warn him to turn away?"

"Not if he had eagle eyes, like yours."

"But your presence dazzles the heart; there is no escape from its power."

"Why, then, like a wise man, resign yourself to fate—"

"If fate would only prescribe some relief."

"Who knows—wait and see."

The conversation dropped insensibly into a more

serious strain; the woman's consummate art aided her in drawing it off the dangerous bounds it was approaching. As he sat there, so full of life and brilliancy, Montgomery hardly appeared the same man who, in the silence of his chamber that morning, had sat looking so listless and world-weary. There was fire in his eyes, passion in his tones, and an unnameable fascination in his presence—a sort of magnetic power, which only a nature of wonderful strength could have resisted.

A clock in the anteroom chimed the hour. Montgomery started, as if in surprise.

"So late?" he said. "Why did you not send me away?"

"You are not so modest that you can be at a loss for the reason. You do not imagine that having once captured a prisoner, I feel disposed to set him immediately at liberty."

"You know well that I shall not be at liberty even when banished from your presence."

"Banished! You won't consider it necessary to wait for a summons to return?"

"A message like that of this morning would almost repay me for the pain."

"Then, if you grow very tired of waiting, come tomorrow and remind me of it."

"I am sure your memory will fail otherwise. Now I must go back to poor, stupid reality."

"And I have visits to make—stupid, is it not? An old acquaintance has arrived here for the winter, with his daughter, so I must play the agreeable. She is sure to be tiresome—girls always are, but Mr. Meredith makes such a point of my paying her attention that I can not refuse."

The young man did not stir; the smile faded from his features, leaving that sickly white about the mouth which so surely betrays strong feelings, and a betrayal from which no person of acute natural sensitiveness can ever free himself, in spite of all the lessons that worldly knowledge and dissimulation may teach.

The lady was arranging a knot of ribbon upon her dress, and the change in his face passed without remark.

"Don't you agree with me?" she said, without raising her eyes.

"Undoubtedly," he returned, with a start. "You can never be wrong."

"Mr. Meredith himself is a splendid man—not so young as he has been, and fearfully dignified, but very pleasant, nevertheless. Do you know him?"

"What? know—"

"Mr. Meredith."

"How should I? New York has been my home so little."

He had regained his composure somewhat, but the color would not return to his cheek, and the smile on his lip possessed a fearful bitterness.

"They say his love for his daughter is little short of idolatry."

"Indeed? He has no other children then?"

"No; it seems to me that he did have a son, too; dead, I believe. Yes, I remember now, he is dead. Nobody ever speaks of him—something painful connected with it, I fancy."

"So he has centered his whole heart on this girl?"

"Utterly. The intense affection of a nature like that must be a great bore."

The young man did not hear this; he had gone to a table to take up his hat, and his face was turned from her.

"How old is this young lady?" he inquired, with assumed indifference. "Do you happen to know her exact age?"

"What a question! Well, seventeen or eighteen; will that answer?"

The young man drew a hard breath.

"Yes, that will answer. Thank you."

"You know I do not believe one word that you have said to me this morning."

"Then I will stay here until I have convinced you."

"You are a dangerous opponent; never at a loss for devices. At least you may bid me good-morning before you go."

He took her hand, and bent over it, then looked into her face with those splendid eyes.

"I have found a new Olympus," he murmured, "but there is only one goddess—the rest have fled in despair at her loveliness."

Before she could make any opposition, he drew her quickly toward him, and, with a gallantry so exquisite that the action appeared hardly audacious, attempted to press his lips to her forehead. She started back with a sudden exclamation, but the flush on her cheek was vivid.

"Do you expect to make your peace after that?" she said.

"Forgive me."

"No," she said, retreating. "You can take leave now."

"Not until I am certain that you have forgiven me."

"Dare you hope it?"

"I only hope audacious things, therefore I expect that."

"Come to-morrow, and I will tell you that I am angry."

When Montgomery found himself alone, every trace of gentle feeling left his countenance. His forehead contracted beneath the pain of thought, and his whole face betrayed the awakening of some smoldering passion.

He walked rapidly on, heedless of the eager crowd, brushing alike rudely past friend and stranger, till he gained the solitude of his own chamber. He flung down his hat, and paced the room with uneven strides, under the influence of some strong emotion which forbade all rest.

"Do they hope this?" he muttered, through his

shut teeth. "Let them beware! I am not wholly powerless yet."

Once his servant entered, but stole away without speaking, awed by the expression of that face, and knowing too well his master's moods to intrude when he found him thus.

CHAPTER VI.

MABEL'S NEW FRIEND.

"MABEL! Mabel!"

It was Mr. Meredith's voice that called, and the girl sprang to her feet as the door opened, and he entered the apartment where she was sitting. She saw only that a stranger was with him—an elegant, aristocratic-looking creature, whose every movement and gesture was full of grace, for before she could move forward, the lady was by her side, and had thrown one arm caressingly about her waist, saying:

"Ah, I need no introduction here. I should have known her from the description, although, glowing as it was, it fell far short of the reality. But perhaps to you I am a stranger, Miss Meredith?"

"Not at all," Mr. Meredith answered.

"A friend of papa's can never seem a stranger to me," Mabel replied, irresistibly attracted by that winning manner.

"Thanks; then we shall have no trouble in becoming acquainted. I detest being on ceremony and visiting people who keep me off at arm's length."

She kissed Mabel's forehead, and threw herself upon a sofa with the easy grace which characterized all her movements, motioning Mr. Meredith to seat himself beside her.

"So you have really unearthed yourself," she said, gayly; "come out of your den to live like a Christian once more. My dear young lady, we can not thank you enough, if it is to your persuasions that we owe his restoration."

"As merry and wild as ever," Mr. Meredith said, smiling.

"Precisely, my dear friend; and the worst or best of it is I shall never be any thing else. *Vive la bagatelle!* is still my motto."

"You are fortunate that nothing occurs—"

"Now don't finish that speech. I know that it was going to be a moral one, and I hate moral lectures, don't you, dear Miss Meredith? How prim that odious 'Miss' sounds—I hate it."

"Don't put it on then," said Mabel, laughing.

"May I call you by your name? Mabel, isn't it? I like that; it makes me feel at home at once."

"I am so little accustomed to hearing any other name, that it sounds strange to me, so pray call me Mabel, Mrs. Eastman."

"Agreed, if you will say Estelle."

"The compact is complete," Mr. Meredith said, laughing. "I think you will get on famously."

"You may be sure of that," returned Mrs. Eastman. "You must acknowledge that I am not *mechante*, and I should not be human if I could resist the language of a face like that. But explain to me what your plans are for the winter?"

"I do not know that we have any," Mr. Meredith replied. "I wish Mabel to be introduced into the world—to be as gay and have as much enjoyment as possible."

"Your position in society will secure her that," rejoined Mrs. Eastman, "and I shall be delighted to do all that I can to make her winter pass pleasantly. I am not matronly enough to be her *chaperone*, and love dancing and attention too well; but, at least, I can be her friend, if she will permit me."

"Look at her face as you speak; is that answer enough?"

"The sweetest I could have. You hardly look like an American, dear, yet you are so beautiful that I should know at once you were one."

"Then your residence abroad did not make you lose all admiration for your own country?" Mr. Meredith said.

"Oh, no. I have too many painful recollections connected with my stay there, pleasant as it was, for that."

"I heard with much regret of your husband's death—"

"Do not speak of it," she interrupted. "I can not bear the thought; he was my best friend—more like a father than a husband. But what a wild thing I was when you saw me. I think I shocked you sometimes, did I not?"

"With grace like yours, as if the thing were possible!"

"At least I shall do so no more; I think my spirits are all gone;" and she gave a little sigh, which might be real or assumed, it was impossible to decide which.

"Are you fond of amusements, dear?" she said, as if wishing to change the conversation: "of the opera and theater?"

"She must not be!" exclaimed Mr. Meredith, with a violence so unusual to him that his listeners were startled. "No child of mine, and no person over whom I have any control, shall ever enter a theater."

"My dear sir," returned Mrs. Eastman, soothingly, "surely you have none of those idle, anti-quated prejudices against the stage?"

"I can not argue the subject, madam, but I repeat, Mabel shall never enter a theater. I am willing to procure her every amusement, comply with her slightest wish in every other respect, but there I am determined; she shall never set foot inside a theater."

Mabel's cheek colored with sudden passion; never before had he addressed her in a tone of command, and her proud spirit revolted at what she deemed its tyranny.

"This is a strange decision," she said, endeavoring to speak calmly. "I like plays very much, and I am certain that the theater would be my favorite amusement."

"Mabel!" His voice was stern and harsh, but checking himself, Mr. Meredith added, in a more natural tone: "We will talk of this another time. Excuse me, Mrs. Eastman, I have a deep-rooted aversion to this thing. It is no idle prejudice—you will overlook it, I am sure."

"Oh, of course. I have too many whims of my own not to respect those of other people."

Mabel made no remark, though a spirit of opposition had been roused in her which would not easily be quelled.

"I must leave you now," Mr. Meredith said, rising. "Pray become acquainted with my little girl as fast as possible, Mrs. Eastman, for I expect you to like her."

"I shall need no persuasion," she replied.

When he had left the room, Mrs. Eastman drew her seat to Mabel's side, and put her arm about the girl's waist with caressing tenderness.

"Now we will have a long chat," she said, gayly; "but tell me, first, what is there in the word theater to make such a tiger of my old friend?"

"I am sure I can not tell. Some unwarrantable prejudice that people sometimes take without cause, I fancy."

"Never mind, dear, don't be annoyed by it."

"But I am certain that I should be charmed with a play. Fancy, I have never even been in a theater."

"Of course you would be charmed; but we will persuade him out of this whimsical resolution, never fear."

"I do not believe it; you little know his unyielding firmness when he has once made a decision."

"Just so with all men, my child. Stupid animals, the best of them! But there's one consolation, we are not women for nothing; we can outwit the sagest of the sex without difficulty. You shall see a play—that I am determined upon."

"I could not bear the thought of deceiving my father, but—"

"You don't wish to be treated like a baby—of course not. Leave it all to me. I'll arrange every thing for you, and we will have our own way in the end, you may be sure."

"It is little enough; one might be allowed that," returned Mabel, laughing, and for the moment throwing aside the vexation caused by her father's words.

"You must have an immensity of shopping to do, my dear. I shall help you, my taste is perfect—everybody says so."

"Papa has ordered me a variety of things from Paris, but I have still much to purchase."

"Shall we devote to-morrow morning to the business—what an odious word, it makes me think of a shopman's ledger."

"I shall be delighted if you can accompany me."

"I am at leisure until half-past three; you can call for me as early as you like."

"I should be certain to come."

"Thanks. But I must run away now, for it is late, and I am going out this evening."

"You will not dine with us?"

"Don't ask me—it breaks my heart to refuse you, but positively I must tear myself away. I shall expect you to-morrow."

"Without fail."

"*Au revoir*, then, *ma belle*. What beautiful eyes you have, to be sure! I am glad you are a blonde; if you had had the misfortune to be a brunette, I should have hated you; as it is, we contrast well together, as a milliner would say. *Au revoir*."

With another embrace, and a flood of pretty speeches, the giddy woman hurried away, leaving Mabel entranced by her winning manner and apparent frank-heartedness.

CHAPTER VII.

MABEL'S SURPRISE.

SEVERAL days passed, during which Mabel saw Mrs. Eastman frequently, and began her acquaintance with the gay world of which she had formed such glowing fancies.

But there was nothing in the vapid emptiness of our new-world society to please a girl like Mabel. The admiration of the butterfly adorers who crowded around only wearied her, and the attraction she felt for Mrs. Eastman was owing to her disregard of the thousand petty rules which regulated the conduct of those about her.

Mabel was walking alone one morning, thinking over the occurrences of the past weeks, and wondering at the feeling of unrest which would not be appeased even amid the gayety and excitement of her new life. There was a vague want in her life, which had no name, but each day it grew stronger, forcing itself more resolutely upon her; until, at times, it seemed to the girl that a great change was coming over her—that fate was about to take up the threads of her destiny and fling them out in far different paths from those which she had before trodden. Then she repressed the idea, with a smile at her own wild fancies, and strove to find relief from thought in the amusements which made up the existence of those about her, but in vain.

A chime of bells, mingling with the tones of an organ, came swelling on the air from a neighboring church, and Mabel, attracted by the melody, ascended the steps and entered the building. It was a day of ceremony in the Mother Church, and the smoke of incense rose from the altars, where gorgeously robed priests were performing mass. The sunlight crept in through the windows of stained glass, taking a thousand fantastic hues, and playing over the floor like molten flame and gleaming rainbows.

When mass was over, the crowd of kneeling worshipers arose and passed out of the church, leaving only here and there some earnest devotee wrapped in meditation.

Mabel awoke herself from the saddening reverie

to which the scene had given rise, and began walking up and down the aisles, regarding the pictures hung in the niches of the altars. She approached a nook where the light fell purple and dim across a painting which attracted her attention from its resemblance to one that hung in the library at her home.

Standing before the painting was a woman dressed in black. The face was turned away, but there was something in the stranger's attitude, as she stood bending slightly forward, her hand concealed under her cloak, which seemed familiar to Mabel. She moved forward. At the sound of her footseps the lady started; she turned quickly, and her eyes looked full into the face of the girl.

Mabel uttered an exclamation of surprise, and stood regarding the lady in astonishment. For an instant she remained thus, unable to recall when or where she had known that face. Then recollection came back; it was the stranger whom she had seen in her home on the Hudson. With the natural impetuosity of her character, she extended her hand, exclaiming:

"You told me that we should meet again, but I did not think that it would be here."

The lady looked at her in silence; her face expressed neither astonishment nor recognition, but at the sound of that glad young voice, a slight quiver shook her frame, as if there had been something in its tone which moved her.

"You do not remember me," said Mabel, sorrowfully. "I knew you immediately."

The lady raised her hand like one enjoining silence, in order to recall her wandering thoughts. The sad light in her eyes softened a little; her lips half parted in a smile, and she allowed Mabel to take her hand.

"I recollect you," she said; "the voice is the same, but you are changed."

"It is the different dress. I have not changed so much."

The woman looked at her in silence.

"It seems so strange that I should meet you here," continued Mabel. "It was merely by accident that I came into the church. One would almost think there was a fate in it."

"No!" returned the lady, quickly. "Do not say that; it is a terrible word. It was chance, mere chance."

"At least, I am much obliged to the chance," said Mabel, "for I have so often thought of you, and longed to see you again."

"To see me—you longed to see me!" said the woman, in a voice which struck painfully on Mabel's ear, there was something so unnatural in it.

"You asked me then if I would remember you—do you recollect it?"

"Did I? Oh, I dare say! You sung to me, did you not? Can you sing that song now?"

"I do, sometimes, but it makes me sad, since the day it distressed you so."

"Ah, then, you were sorry for me, but you are not unhappy?"

"No, not that; but it seems to me that I have not been so happy since you left me."

"And why?"

"I am so restless without any reason. I want to know why I live—what life really is; and I can find no clew! It seems to me that the time will come when the question shall be answered; but now, every thing is so misty and indistinct, that I do not know which way to look."

She spoke rapidly, without pausing for thought. There was a power in that woman's presence which impelled her to speak. All the eager questionings which had so long troubled her, rose in a torrent to her lips—one of those inexplicable sensations which sometimes, at the sight of a person utterly unknown, agitated Mabel. It seemed to her that she must speak to that stranger, without restraint, of all the wild thoughts which she had so carefully hidden from every other human being.

"Can you tell me why all this is? Will the clouds soon clear away? Shall I find an answer to my demand?"

While she spoke the stranger stood motionless, looking in the girl's face as if that impatient voice had been the echo of her own heart.

"Tell me," repeated Mabel, "shall I find an answer?"

"To what?"

"What is life—what will my future be?"

"What is life—do you ask that? If the wanderer of the Holy Writ still walks the earth, he asks daily of his own soul the same question! Your future!—do not ask that; it will come soon enough."

"But I lack something. I want—"

"Well?"

"A change—I don't know what—something to do; something to think about. Everybody is kind to me, but my life seems so useless, so uneventful."

"Poor child, poor child!"

"Can you not tell me what to do? I have thought of you so often, and it seemed to me that if I could only see you again you would be able to tell me all that I can ask of no one else."

"You thought that? Why should you have done so? You did not know me."

"And yet, I could not feel so; it seemed to me that I had known you so a long time."

"Know me? no, no; you never did, you never can, know me. What could I tell you—nothing. Go your ways, child; follow the course which is marked out for you: let the future take care of itself; it will be here soon enough."

She turned to move away, but Mabel caught her hand.

"Do not go yet," she said; "I want to talk to you."

She spoke with an earnest solicitation which made

the woman pause. Mabel had lived so entirely aloof from the world that the thought of her imprudence in thus addressing a stranger, did not even occur to her.

"I can do you no good," she returned, sadly. "God help me; I have no power to aid any human being. I do not know how to counsel you. The very kindnesses I seek to confer, turn to misery on the heads of those I strive to aid. Go home; be content to take life as it is. I have heard that there be those to whom it continues tranquil and undisturbed. Pray to God that it may be thus with you."

She broke from Mabel's grasp, and would have hastened away, but again the young girl's pleading voice made her pause.

"Then we shall not meet again?"

"Why should we?"

"And I must go back to my home, unquiet and restless as ever. Is there no one to answer me?"

"No human being can. Men call on Providence, but Providence is often silent. They fill up their little sum of existence—suffer, moan, pray—and then die. What comes after, we know not. But I do not doubt—no, no, thank Heaven—I do not doubt. The angels are sometimes deaf to our supplications here, but I do believe that beyond the confines of this prison house they will listen to us. Take that for your consolation, if it be one. I have no other to offer. Farewell."

Before Mabel could speak or move, the woman walked from the spot, leaving her there alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST STEP.

"HERE I am again, you see, Mabel! Now own that you are heartily tired of my daily visits."

"You only want me to flatter you; I shall say nothing!"

"How impolite! But then you know that you are a savage—beautiful, but still a savage," returned Mrs. Eastman, sinking herself to a couch. "I am tired to death, and ran away from my rooms to escape the people that would keep flocking in upon me. What a torment society is!"

"You see," said Mabel, laughing, "my politeness would have been wasted. You acknowledge that you came here only because you were bored at home."

"But I had another reason. I was dying to see you—"

"Ah!"

"Now do be serious—nonsense is my forte—don't attempt it. But I really have something to tell you. I showed you, the other day, some criticisms of that young actor who is turning all the women's heads."

"What of him? You excited my curiosity so strongly that I have done nothing since but search the newspapers, to learn more about him."

"He has a benefit to-night, and Mrs. — plays with him—only fancy!"

"It will indeed be *only* fancy," replied Mabel, smiling, and shaking her head. "I would give the world to see him; but it is useless to think of it."

"I would give ten worlds rather than stay away! But can't you persuade this obstinate papa?"

"You could as easily move a rock! I ventured to speak of it again the other day, and for the first time in his life he was angry with me."

"What did he say?"

"That while I remained under his roof I should never enter a theater."

"What odious tyranny. I did not think he had been such a Turk!"

"I can do nothing but submit; I would not offend him for more than I can express."

"But you are not a child, my dear. Why do you allow yourself to be treated like one? Men are born to be ruled—husbands or fathers—remember that; and you may as well govern all of the sex that come in your way, as a preparative for married life. To think of your missing that play! Why, Montgomery only stops here a fortnight longer. You can imagine nothing like him—a perfect Apollo. Such a voice—such eyes, and the way he makes love! Oh, my darling, I pity you!"

"Let us talk of something else. It only vexes me to remember of what delight I am deprived."

"After all, Mr. Meredith might not care so much as you think."

"But he has expressed his wishes clearly," said Mabel; "I can not act contrary to them."

"Quite right, my dear; beautiful in sentiment, but practice is another thing. Duty and affection are exploded words—they have no significance in this rapid age."

"I should not like to forget them."

"But you must go to the theater. My heart is set on it. I shall die if I am disappointed."

"It is impossible! Papa would never consent; I dare not even mention the subject again."

"Don't, then."

"But what can I do?"

"Go without, simpleton! Fie, you will never be a woman of the world if you go on in this manner."

"If he were to know it he would disown me. Papa can be stern, I tell you."

"He never need know it. Now, don't look shocked, nor purse up that pretty mouth—it is quite too pretty to give forth sermons. You can go to the theater and he be none the wiser; nothing more easy."

"Would you have me tell him a falsehood?"

"What a word, little barbarian! Of course not; I only ask you to do something much more difficult for a woman—to keep your own counsel and hold your tongue. I will tell him that you are going to spend a quiet evening with me, and will perhaps stay all night, as I am ill. Don't frown; I shall be if I am disappointed! I have a box at the theater, and we will go quietly there, get neatly stowed away

behind the curtains, and return as decorously as the most fastidious could desire. Now, what is there so frightful in that?"

"Nothing, I suppose; but I dislike to do it."

"Nonsense; remember what you miss if you allow these idle scruples to influence you, and they will speedily be forgotten. No more words; go and dress. I will see Mr. Meredith, and tell him that I am going to run off with his princess."

"I cannot do it, Mrs. Eastman, indeed I cannot," said Mabel.

"Now, my dear, don't prove a coward, or I shall despise you! Dress yourself, because I am here with the intention of taking you home with me. I must be back in half an hour, and believe me, I have no intention of going without my lady-bird."

Mabel would have expostulated, but her friend silenced her with a kiss, and hurried out of the room to seek Mr. Meredith. Mabel began to dress in great irresolution, her mind filled with a vague sort of trouble, which she could not drive away.

In a few moments Mrs. Eastman returned, laughing merrily, and exclaiming, as she entered:

"Victory! victory! Hurry! hurry! Your redoubtable dragon melted like wax in the sunshine of my smile. The day is ours!"

"He did not consent to my going to the theater?"

"Of course not, you little goose. You don't suppose I ever alluded to the thing! No, my dear, I put on my most sanctimonious face, assured him that I was dying of headache, and wanted to take you home in order to read me a hymn. But where is Agnes? Ring for her; don't stand there so stupid."

"What spirits you have!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Of course I have; it is my profession. Here is Agnes. Now dress, and don't speak to me till you are ready to go, for I wish to read."

She sat down and took a novel from the table, while Mabel's toilet was going on. The misguided girl looked pale from the conflict within between inclination and duty, but she had been too utterly spoiled by indulgence to pause now!

"At last!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman, flinging down her book, as Mabel rose from her seat; "ready at last—palo as a lily, and just as beautiful!"

She hurried her away, without giving her time to relent. They met Mr. Meredith in the hall, but Mrs. Eastman would not be delayed beyond a passing salutation.

"Good-by," she said, kissing her hand to him as he assisted them into the carriage. "I'll bring our princess back safe, never fear."

They drove off, and the charm of her companion's conversation soon banished from Mabel's mind the anxious doubts which had beset her.

Mrs. Eastman did not again mention the theater; she was too wily a diplomatist to endanger her cause by further discussion. When evening came she dressed without a word, bade her woman make the necessary alterations in Mabel's attire, and drew her into the saloon, where a gentleman whom she had before met awaited them.

Mabel was given no opportunity for remonstrance, and almost before she realized it, they were seated in a carriage, and whirled swiftly away.

When they drew up at the brilliantly-lighted entrance of the theater, Mabel sunk back in the seat, tremblin' in every limb.

"Don't be a baby!" said her friend, in a whisper; "I hate weak people. Do bravely what you make up your mind to do—hesitation is ridiculous."

Mabel descended from the carriage in silence, mechanically accepted the arm their cavalier extended, and entered the lobby. She heard a tumult, which seemed to come from afar—was conscious that they were passing through a long gallery. In a moment a door was flung open, a glare of light burst upon her, an outburst of music, and she knew that they stood in the theater.

"Sit there," Mrs. Eastman said, pushing Mabel gently into a seat, where she was screened from the sight of the audience by the heavy orange-colored curtains. "You have a good view of the stage, and are as safe as a dove in its cot; as for Livingston here, he is as innocent as one, and ready to swear that he never saw you in all his life."

Mabel laughed gayly. Her spirits rose; a strange excitement took possession of her, and she forgot her fears, her remorse, and gave herself up to the intoxicating pleasure of the moment.

One of the most celebrated tragedies in the English tongue had been selected for that evening's entertainment, and the theater was crowded with eager spectators, gathered to witness the efforts of the two distinguished performers of the evening.

The opening scenes were listened to with breathless eagerness, and when the young hero of the night trod proudly down toward the footlights, in sight of that vast throng, the shouts of applause which greeted him were almost deafening. They died away at last, and his voice rose clear and powerful, yet with a sweetness in its tone which moved the coldest heart.

Mabel leaned forward, heedless of the eyes which might be bent upon her, forgetting every thing in the spell flung about her by that presence.

As the play went on, and the actor gathered up his full strength, Mabel's interest grew more intense. Several times her companions addressed her, but she did not heed or turn her gaze, but sat fascinated.

Suddenly the heroine appeared upon the scene, amid the tumultuous greetings of the crowd. But soon Mabel forgot the woman, so deeply did her interest center in that man! She could not have turned her eyes away had life depended upon it. She watched him as a fascinated bird might the serpent who is charming it to death.

At length she seemed to attract the performer's attention. Several times he glanced toward the box,

and had Mabel been watching Mrs. Eastman, she would have seen the quick smile which shot over her lips, and the gesture of greeting she made.

The curtain fell upon the last act, shutting out from the girl's sight the glorious world wherein she had reveled.

"Come, Mabel," exclaimed Mrs. Eastman; "come back to life—the play is over."

"You were charmed, were you not?" continued her companion. "Is he not splendid? Did I say too much—isn't he an Apollo?"

Mabel made no reply. Those words irritated her, and she turned impatiently away; but her companion did not remark it.

The crowd was so great that they were forced to wait for some time in the box. Mr. Livingston had gone to order the carriage, and Mabel, heedless of her friend's presence, stood bewildered by the wondrous vision which had just passed before her.

Their cavalier appeared at last; but it was not until Mrs. Eastman had twice repeated her name that the girl started up.

"You are bewitched, Mabel; don't deny it. You will go theater-mad."

They passed into the crowded lobby, and in the pressure of the throng Mabel lost her hold upon her companion's arm. As she looked around, frightened at her situation, some one drew close to her side, took her hand gently in his, while a voice, which she recognized only too well, said, gently:

"Pardon me; your friends are only a little in advance, but you will be crushed in this crowd."

She made no reply—she had no power, but allowed him to lead her passively on. Once she raised her eyes—they met his, and those dark orbs flashed as they had done through the passion scenes of the play. She knew him—it was Montgomery, the actor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SERPENT IN THE GARDEN.

The morning after that meeting, which was to have an influence upon her whole destiny, Mabel sat alone in her chamber, recalling every expression of that changing face, every tone of that voice, whose accents had sunk so deep into her passionate soul, filling its dreams with vitality.

She was aroused by the entrance of Mr. Meredith, and started up in sudden confusion, feeling almost that he must read in her face the thoughts which filled her mind with a delicious unrest. There came, too, the recollection of the deceit which she had practiced toward him, and the bitter self-reproaches which succeed a first act of treachery toward a beloved object, made themselves felt with new poignancy.

"Did I startle you, child?" he said. "You look terrified. Did you leave Mrs. Eastman better?"

"She is quite well," Mabel faltered.

"You have come back just in time to wish me good-by."

"What do you mean—you are not going away?"

"I am obliged to leave town for a week. I did not know it myself until late last night."

"And do you leave me behind?"

"I must. It is too late in the season for you to travel. I shall not be gone long."

Mabel sunk back in her seat, unable to analyze her own feelings. She felt almost a sensation of joy at the thought of his absence, and again a pang of reproach wrung her heart at her own ingratitude.

"You need not look grave," he said, in his kindest voice; "you must persuade your friend, Mrs. Eastman, to stay with you and prevent your getting lonely."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Mabel, unwilling to add to the wrong she had committed by placing herself so entirely under the influence of the woman who had already counseled her so badly. "I shall not be very lonely."

"I thought you had taken one of your violent attachments for her?"

"Yes, oh yes, she is very kind, but she may not like leaving her rooms—"

"I will answer for that. I shall drive by her hotel, and give her your invitation. You may be certain of seeing her within an hour. Now, good-by, my child, good-by!"

Mabel threw herself into his arms, with a gush of irrepressible tears.

"Hurry back," she said, as he soothed her with his quiet kindness; "I don't think I'm fit to be left alone."

"I will trust you; there are few in the world to whom I could say as much. Good-by."

He was gone; and Mabel gave herself up to the painful reflections which his presence and affectionate words had aroused. But she was not allowed much leisure for the indulgence of those sad fancies; Mrs. Eastman's voice sounded on the stairs, bringing her back to the duties of the hour.

"Here I am, my dear," she exclaimed, opening the door; "I could not refuse Mr. Meredith's appeal to my sympathies for beauty in distress. But how do you find yourself after our last night's adventure?"

"Don't speak of it! Oh, Mrs. Eastman, I have done wrong!"

"Now, don't play the penitent, I beg; it is not at all in your line. Make all the good resolutions you please for the future, but don't go into a Jeremiad over what is past."

"What spirits you have! Do you never feel sad?"

"I? What a horrid question! Of course not! But come, my dear, don't starve me to death in this bird's nest of flowers—I could eat no breakfast with thinking of your distress."

"I will order luncheon at once—"

"Do so; and the carriage after. I have no fancy for being mewed up in the house this lovely day."

She turned away humming a song, and Mabel, with a sigh for her broken dream, resigned herself to the idle amusement of the morning.

Toward dinner time they were sitting in Mrs. Eastman's apartment, when a servant entered with a card.

"Show him up," said that lady, glancing at the name with a smile; and as the man went out she turned to Mabel.

"You never would guess who has called. I have the most delightful surprise for you!"

Mabel was so engrossed in her own thoughts that she hardly heard the words. Mrs. Eastman fluttered away to a mirror; then composed herself in a pretty attitude on the sofa. Just then the door opened; Mabel glanced toward it, and her heart seemed to cease beating—it was Montgomery.

She heard the gay words of compliment with which he addressed Mrs. Eastman. Then her own name was spoken:

"Mabel, dear," cried her friend, "pray come out of the clouds. I am presenting Mr. Montgomery to you. Your acting left her quite dazed—she has been in a dream since last night."

"So have I," he murmured, as he bent toward the young girl.

Some way these words recalled her presence of mind.

"I have to thank Mr. Montgomery for assisting me last night," she said, in a voice whose composure made her wonder.

"Was it he who extricated you from the crowd?" asked Mrs. Eastman. "Why didn't you say so?"

"Probably she was not certain until now," he replied, before she could speak, keeping his eyes full upon her face, and noting how the crimson bloomed into her cheek.

"Now, be good enough to sit down between us, and make yourself agreeable," said Mrs. Eastman, gayly.

"You have destroyed the possibility now, if there had been any," he said, laughing, but taking the seat she motioned him toward.

"Don't play the modest," she returned; "it would be your one unsuccessful part."

"Please do not use those words," he said, brushing his hair back from his forehead; "let me forget the stage for a little while, if I can."

Mabel caught the sad expression which came over his features—he had struck the key-note by exciting her young sympathies.

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not like it?" returned Mrs. Eastman. "I shall not believe you; will you, Mabel?"

"It seems to me a strangely fascinating pursuit," she answered, in a low voice.

"Ah, Miss Meredith, you only see one side of the picture—that before the curtain. You know nothing of the hours of discouragement and loneliness—the sense of misappreciation of the man, even by those who profess to admire the actor."

It was the same deep, rich voice which had wiled her heart into that beautiful dream on the previous night, and it made her pulses tremble again.

"To me it would be perfectly intoxicating," said Mrs. Eastman; "I think there is no fame like an actor's—it is so real, comes so closely home."

"And is so evanescent," he added.

"What difference does that make? It is much better than having people wait till one is in the grave before one is appreciated."

He shook his head and made no reply—his eyes wandered again toward Mabel, and then the lids drooped sadly over them.

"Do you know," pursued Mrs. Eastman, "that this child never was in a theater until last night?"

Mabel colored painfully, and made an appealing gesture toward her friend, at which Mrs. Eastman only laughed.

"We have a secret," said she, "and Mabel is afraid I shall reveal it. I have a mind to do so."

"Ah, then we shall have one in common," he exclaimed, in that impulsive way which appeared natural to him, and which was so irresistible; "tell it, I beg."

"Do not, Mrs. Eastman," Mabel entreated.

"I wonder which I had better oblige," said she. "You are safe, Mabel, in having it told—this creature is so wild and willful himself that he will only admire you the more for your naughty escapade."

"Please let her tell me, Miss Meredith," he added; "I shall be less afraid of you if I find you are not quite perfect."

Mabel still pleaded, but Mrs. Eastman loved mischief too well to remain silent.

"I must tell," she exclaimed; "I really must! The truth is, I ran away with her last night. Mr. Meredith would kill us both if he knew we had been to the theater."

"I did very wrong," Mabel said, feeling tears of mingled shame and vexation rising to her eyes.

There was a peculiar smile on Montgomery's lip, which neither observed.

"It is hardly worth repenting," he said; "it was a mere frolic."

"But I assure you, Mr. Meredith would not look on it in that light," said Mrs. Eastman, unable to resist her pleasure in teasing. "He has the most fearful aversion to the theater, and thinks actors—oh, dear me, out of pity for you, I won't tell you what he does think of them."

Again Montgomery smiled that bitter smile, which changed the expression of his face so entirely.

"I do not blame any one for those prejudices," he said, after a moment's silence; "perhaps they are natural, but I think, Miss Meredith, if you knew more of my profession, you would not share in them."

"I do not," she said, hastily; "indeed, I do not."

He spoke very seriously then of his art, and every

THE BRIDE OF AN ACTOR.

word found an echo in Mabel's mind. She forgot her penitence in listening—forgot everything but the beautiful dream which had so suddenly dawned upon her undisciplined mind.

"I shall only think you believe me on one condition."

"And what is that?" asked Mrs. Eastman.

"That Miss Meredith promises to accompany you to the theater to-night."

"I cannot," exclaimed Mabel; "indeed, I cannot."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Eastman. "You must, and shall! Make her promise, Mr. Montgomery."

"I can only add my entreaties to yours. I have no right to do even that."

"If you don't go, Mabel, I'll be cross for a week," said Mrs. Eastman. "I won't hear of a refusal."

They both pleaded with her until her scruples quite gave way, and she promised to accompany Mrs. Eastman to the theater that night.

"Now you talk like a sensible girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman. "At eighteen one doesn't choose to be treated like a baby."

"The usual mistake of parents and guardians," said Montgomery; "they call tyranny affection, and are astonished when their charges rebel."

Mabel was silent, but for the first time it seemed to her that her father was unjust and cruel. Then she ceased to think about him, and shut her ears to the self-reproaches which began to come up. Montgomery was speaking again—talking in a poetical way which could not have failed to produce an effect upon a girl of her age and peculiar ignorance of the world.

"I have outstayed my time," he said, at last, rising to go; "you should have sent me away."

"Oh, you have not wearied us much," she replied, laughingly; "has he Mabel?"

"If you knew how precious this hour will be to me, you would easily forgive," he returned, and Mrs. Eastman received the compliment as intended for herself, but Mabel caught a quick flash from those wonderful eyes which went to her heart like a sudden dawn.

"You may come again and make your peace," said Mrs. Eastman, in her easy, coquettish way, as she held out her hand to him.

He bowed silently to Mabel, and went away, but to the last she felt his eyes upon her, as if he could not keep his gaze from wandering that way.

"Isn't he a wonderful creature?" cried Mrs. Eastman, when the door closed behind him. "I didn't tell you I knew him, because I wanted to astonish you. Now we'll have dinner, and then dress. Don't look so forlorn; make the best of everything; that is my philosophy."

Mabel made no answer. Alas, she was not reproaching herself—she was not even trying to account for the new feelings which had come over her. She was only dreaming wildly, and content to float forever down the sunny stream upon which her unguided bark had so unexpectedly drifted.

"And now for the Duke!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman, when the servant announced the carriage. "Come, my beauty, it is time to go."

In the same inexplicable mood, Mabel suffered her to lead her away, and again drank in the light from the eyes whose influence had already become the controlling power in her life.

CHAPTER X.

THE AWAKENING.

ELEANOR MITCHELL sat alone in a room of the house which she had taken when the restraint of a hotel became insupportable to her.

Those who, for so many years, had been harshest in their condemnation of the woman, might have pitied her, had they seen her in that hour of solitude and self-abandonment.

A month had elapsed since her first interview with Mr. Meredith, and not a step had been gained. The discouragement which had come over her seemed harder to bear than all the suffering of her past life.

A strange existence it had been; one more utterly blighted and misjudged, it would have been impossible to conceive. The wretched woman had started for America, and in her perplexity and madness had sought out Meredith on her arrival. With no effect; he could give her no information; all either gained by the meeting, was a reopening of the old wounds that would never wholly close again. So there she sat in her lonely house that day, brooding over all these things, wondering how much longer she could bear that intolerable suffering and suspense, and what other trials life could have in store.

Even to be certain that her child was dead would have been a relief; but to think of it living, grown to womanhood, and never to have heard her mother's voice, or even her mother's name! The horrible uncertainty of the fate she might have met; the agony of knowing that both might live for long years to come, and she never be able to find the slightest trace of her child. Probably no life could produce an instance of more utter wretchedness.

Mr. Meredith had made every search which his ingenuity could suggest—no such child had grown up among her husband's family—no trace, anywhere he turned.

Eleanor was living quite without friends or society, except when he came to see her, and of late it had been only painful to meet even him, so that she had not even had that break in the monotony of her existence.

How she had passed her time, she could hardly herself have told. She could neither read nor use her needle. She dreaded going out, for this return to her native country brought all that past so vividly to her mind that she could not believe it had been almost forgotten by old acquaintances she might chance to meet.

Repose was torture; she used to walk for hours through the parlors and hall, back and forth, back and forth, until she was forced to rest from sheer physical weakness. But when night came, she could not sleep; she would lie staring blankly before her, wondering only how much longer before madness or death would come. If she fell into a broken slumber, it was only to dream of her child, always as she had last seen it, almost an infant. She would hear it wailing feebly for help—putting out its little hands to her—and when she tried to grasp it, some terrible shape would snatch it away, and she woke with wild cries, and drops of agony on her forehead.

She had seated herself now, quite worn out from sleeplessness and fatigue, too weak for the moment, even to feel acute suffering; nothing was left but the dull, heavy pain which follows the first sharp pang of a wound.

The door opened and Mr. Meredith entered unannounced. She did not look up, or pay any attention.

"Eleanor," he said, softly, for the old lawyer had fallen into the habit of calling her by that familiar name; "Eleanor!"

She looked up, languidly.

"Is it you?" she said; "you are very kind to come; sit down."

He drew a chair to her side and took one of her hands in his own, shocked to see the change which had come over her since they parted.

"Are you very weak to-day?" he asked.

"So tired," she moaned; "oh, so tired!"

"I came to talk with you," he continued, "but you must not be agitated."

She snatched her hand away, and for the first time looked full in his face. In spite of his habit of disguising his feelings, and the restraint he was putting upon himself, she knew that something had happened.

"You have news!" she gasped; "tell me—quick—quick or I shall die."

Her face grew so ghastly that he was rising in alarm, but she grasped his arm with a force of which she did not appear capable.

"Tell me—this is worse than death—any thing else."

He saw that the most abrupt announcement would not be as dangerous for her as that suspense.

"I have received an answer to the advertisement," he said. "Margaret Hawkins's grandson has been to see me."

She leaned a little forward—her lips moved—at last she whispered:

"My child! my child!"

"I have no news of that, but Margaret is alive in California."

Eleanor leaned back in her chair, white and still; she had not fainted, but she was powerless and rigid as if stricken by catalepsy. He brought water, bathed her face, and forced her to swallow a few drops. After a while she came to herself like a person recovering from a long swoon.

"It's over," she said, her voice growing firmer; "I am strong now."

"You had better lie down a little," he said; "I will wait till you are able to talk."

"No, no, I am well," she exclaimed, forcing back her strength in a way that was wonderful. "When can I start?"

He almost thought her mind wandering for an instant.

"Start?" he repeated.

"Yes—when does a steamer sail for California?"

"To-morrow—we will send a trusty messenger."

"Send!" she cried. "Are you mad? Secure my passage at once. I go to-morrow."

"But you are not able; you could not endure the journey—"

She stopped him with a quick gesture.

"For the first time in years I have a hope. If I had strength to live until now, do you not think I can bear this?"

"But a messenger would do as well—"

"You torture me! Don't argue with me—don't plead. Let me go—I must go! I should die here. Think of me sitting in this room for weeks, perhaps months, waiting—waiting!"

He saw at once that it would be worse for her than any physical fatigue, and ceased his dissuasions.

"Where is the man?" she asked. "Why didn't you bring him?"

"He is waiting in the hall. I was anxious that you should not see him at first."

She motioned him to call the stranger, and he obeyed. The man entered—a respectable, civil-looking person.

"You are Margaret Hawkins's grandson?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You know she is alive?"

"Here is a letter I got only the other day, from my brother, ma'am; you can see what it says about her."

She took the letter from his hand, and tried to read the passage he pointed out.

"It's all black," she groaned; "read it—read it."

Mr. Meredith leaned over her shoulder and read it to her, she grasping the paper all the while, as if it was visible hope which she could not let go.

"Where is it dated?"

"Marysville."

"And only a month old. I shall find her alive—I know I shall. Oh, my child, my child!"

The man told her all he could, and Mr. Meredith motioned him to go away.

"The reward," she said, suddenly remembering; "pay him. Make him happy if we can. It is a good thing to be happy. I almost feel it."

After the man had gone, Mr. Meredith forced her

to lie down upon the sofa; but she would only do so on one condition, that he should send at once to the steamer.

"I want to see my ticket," she said; "then I shall feel that I am going, surely going."

"If you will try to sleep, I will arrange every thing for you. Mrs. Morgan will go with you, of course?"

She nodded, so he rung for the housekeeper, a faithful woman who had been with Eleanor for several years, and explained to her the preparations that were to be made. She had undertaken too many long and hurried journeys, while in her mistress's service, to be surprised, and promised that everything should be in readiness by the morning.

"Take care of her," he whispered, pointing to Eleanor. "I shall be back very soon."

Though a hasty journey was in preparation in that house, everything was quiet. You heard the opening of drawers and locking of trunks up-stairs—the quick rush of feet, joint sobs and low exclamations in the drawing-room, but there was no confusion anywhere.

While Mrs. Mitchell was pacing up and down the room, locking and unlocking her hands, a visitor entered the house, and walked with a quiet step into the drawing-room. The woman paused, struck dumb by the presence of a man who from her youth up, had been the agony and joy of her life. It was the lawyer. Why had he returned?

"Eleanor."

Her locked hands fell apart, her lips began to quiver.

"Anson," she said, and the hidden tenderness of years gushed out eloquently in that single word. "Anson, have you come to me at last?"

Meredith moved across the room, his features began to tremble, his step was hurried, he took the two hands that had trembled apart from each other, and gathered them lovingly between his own.

"Eleanor, look in my face."

She lifted her eyes, those dark, wild eyes, full of inquiry.

"The old look," he said, gathering her hands tighter; "the dear old look."

She cried out, smitten to the heart by a pang of exceeding joy!

"Anson—Anson, what is this? Have I gone mad?"

"Eleanor, I have had a struggle. Since the night we met so unexpectedly I have had no rest, no power to resist the new life flowing in upon my darkness. In my first youth I loved you as man never loved woman, and now I walk over the ashes of half a lifetime and say: Eleanor, I love you yet as man never loved woman."

She fell to the floor, wound her arms about his knees, and bowing her head, began to weep. He reached down his hands to lift her up, but she caught them to her lips, and kissed them.

"And you still love me, Eleanor?"

She stood up, pushed the black hair from her temples, and looked in his face.

"Love you—love you? Oh, if I had words—oh, if I but had words to say how much."

He took her in his arms then, and kissed her on the forehead and the quivering mouth.

"Eleanor, we are both free. Let us put the old life, with its hard duties and bitter anguish, quite away. You and I have crossed the desert, but I hear the tinkle of cool waters and see gleams of young grass. The down-hill road may be short, but you and I will travel it together."

She understood him, but through the very outbreak of her happiness a thought came flashing;

"My child—my child! I had forgotten her!"

His arms loosened, he looked down upon her tenderly.

"We will look for her together, Eleanor."

She withdrew herself from his arms, and sat down wearily. The remembrances of a sorrowful life came slowly back upon her—her anguish, her odious marriage, and surging darkly above all, her disgrace.

"No," she said, with weary tenderness, "this must not—can never, never be! How should I dare to bring scornful eyes on you?"

"I can afford to defy them, Eleanor."

"No, no. I have tried that. You never must."

"And you can give me up now?"

"No, no, I cannot. It is you that must do it. You must shun me, and save yourself from the contagion of my evil name. Great heavens, that the mighty temptation should fall upon me here and now!"

"Eleanor, this is madness."

"No; no; it is love—great, holy love."

"But this is no way to prove it. In my youth you doubted me."

"I did—I did!"

"Will you repeat the wrong?"

"No, no; in this I atone for it."

He went up to her, and took her hand.

"Eleanor, listen to me. You are feeble now—"

"Yes, very feeble."

"Timid, confused. Let us talk no more of this to-day; take time. I can trust the heart that has loved me so long. I cannot stay in the same city without seeing you, for no schoolboy was ever so weak. But for a day or two I will go away. Compose yourself, darling, think kindly of me, fling off the morbid idea of disgrace, and when I come back—"

The yearning tenderness in her eyes checked his speech, and it ended in a gaze that carried the eloquent words into the depths of her heart. She saw him moving toward the door vaguely, as if he were penetrating a cloud.

When the woman who had been busy up-stairs came in, her mistress had fainted.

Eleanor slept that night as she had never slumbered since her youth, with her white hands folded

over her heart, and a smile of ineffable softness on her lips. She arose in the morning very grave and quiet, but still with a brooding light upon her face.

"Yes," she said, when the old lawyer came, and would have dissuaded her from the journey, "I must go. It is doubly necessary now that I quit this place; but have no fear for me—I go with hope."

When the sun went down, Eleanor Mitchell was beyond the sight of land, drifting away toward that new country to which her strange fate was leading her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TEST OF LOVE.

ALMOST three weeks had elapsed since Mr. Meredith left the city. To Mabel they had been more replete with excitement and change than the whole of her previous life. She hardly recognized herself as the dreaming girl of the past year. She had sprung suddenly to the maturity of her womanhood under the new influences which surrounded her.

She remained only a few days with Mrs. Eastman, longing for the solitude and freedom of her own home. Montgomery visited her constantly, and as he was unknown to the servants it excited no remark. When she left Mrs. Eastman's she had determined never to see him again, or even to trust herself at the theater; but the resolution had been of brief endurance.

He besieged her in her walks, he wrote to her, and at last won permission to visit her at her house. She knew now that he loved her—he had told her so—and this new affection had made up the beautiful but feverish life of those weeks.

He met her self-reproaches with exquisite sophistries; he made her vow that if it came to a decision between giving up him or parting with her father, that she would marry him at once.

It was a mingled feeling which inspired Montgomery. He loved her, that was certain; but his nature was so proud and impetuous, that it was dangerous to depend upon that affection, however engrossing it might be.

He would have gladly married her at once, but even her romantic impetuosity could not bring her to take that step, without an effort to obtain her father's consent, and he now looked eagerly forward to Mr. Meredith's return, hoping that some outbreak might occur which would separate the father and child.

Of their frequent meetings or engagement Mrs. Eastman did not even dream; she believed that Montgomery was rather fascinated by herself, and was sufficiently well pleased to keep up a sort of flirtation with him. She had rapidly recovered from her short-lived fancy for Mabel, and it would only have needed a knowledge of the truth to have turned her feelings into a respectable degree of hatred, which might have proved dangerous to the girl.

The days flew by, and Mabel ceased to take any note of their departure, so wholly lost was she in the mazes of that first bewildering passion.

Mr. Meredith had written to say that he should return by the end of that week. Mabel had only a feeling of regret when she read the message, then an hour of keen self-reproach when she reflected upon the wrong she had done.

Yet, after all, the girl was more to be pitied than blamed. She had been left with her heart and fancy so untrained and undisciplined that nothing could now effect the work but real and poignant suffering. In the tyranny of his affection, for it had been that, Mr. Meredith had neglected those important counsels; he had not studied the girl's character, and was ignorant of the real strength it possessed. Properly directed, it would have made her a splendid woman; as it was, her very abilities would probably only lead her into trouble and unhappiness.

She was selfish from mere indulgence; at the same time, she was capable of any sacrifice for those she loved. At present, her whole soul had so centered upon that man that all her self-abnegation would have been in his favor—the love and protection of the past weighed as nothing in the scale.

She was sitting in the library, after reading Mr. Meredith's letter, and while she was still yielding to the reproaches of her conscience, Montgomery was shown into the room.

He went toward her, took her hands, and looked down into her face.

"My bird looks sad," he said; "what has happened?"

She held up a letter, while the great tears rose in her eyes.

"From papa," she said. "Oh, Charles, what will he say to me when he knows the truth?"

Montgomery frowned; in his egotism he felt wronged even by her grief.

"Can you place any affection in comparison with mine?" he asked.

"You know I do not. But I feel to-day how wicked it is of me to deceive one who has loved me so well. He will be here this week."

"Then there will be an end of our meeting. Have you thought of that, Mabel?"

She only answered by a look.

"And how will you endure it?"

"I can not tell. Oh, I am very wretched."

"Wretched while I love you? Have you forgotten how often you have told me I was dear to you? Have you—"

"Don't reproach me—please don't. I can not bear it. Only tell me what to do. Help me, instead of adding to my distress by such cruel words."

"Heaven knows I would not willingly pain you, Mabel, but what can I say? You will not listen to my advice. There is only one course open to you, if you do indeed love me, and desire to be happy."

She shrunk back in her chair, but he wound his arm about her waist, and drew her toward him.

"Are you growing afraid of me already?" he whispered. "Oh, Mabel, listen to me. What right has any one to come between you and your happiness? Is not a wife to forsake all the world for her husband? Once married to me, there is much more hope of that man's granting you his pardon, if that is necessary to your peace."

"It would be, indeed it would! I should be miserable to think he had ceased to love me."

He drew his arm away, and his brows gathered in a frown.

"Ah," he said, "I was mad to think I should ever find a love like mine! See, Mabel, I would give up every hope on earth if it could bring you happiness, yet you hesitate to dare for me even the displeasure of a tyrannical man."

"But he was never tyrannical with me—indeed he was not."

"Because you never thwarted his wishes—the moment you do that you will feel how harsh he can be. Has he not deprived you of the rational pleasures of your age—not even allowed to enter a theater—"

"Oh, but I think he must have had some strong reason for that prohibition—it was not like him."

Montgomery smiled meaningly.

"Only one of his whims; but it is useless to talk of these trifles. The time is coming when you must choose between your father and the man you have sworn one day to call your husband."

"Oh, it is hard, very hard," she murmured through her tears.

"Then you do not love me."

She laid her hand upon his arm, and the piteous entreaty in her face silenced even his selfish reproaches.

"But how will you decide—for decide you must? He will discover the truth, and a decision will be forced upon you."

"I think if he knew how I love you, how good and noble you are, he would forgive us," she said, faintly.

"Never! I tell you he would see you in your grave, rather than allow you to be my wife. He prides himself upon never changing his resolutions—it is that obstinacy which has made his life so desolate and solitary."

"But he has been so loving, so kind to me! I can not think of him as hard."

"Always that one answer! If you can, give up your life to him—sacrifice yourself and me! I have told you all that you are to me—you know what my past has been. Leave me, and I shall drift away from every hope that makes existence worth having. Do this, I say, and when it is too late, break your heart in unavailing remorse! You will have done a wicked thing. You will have ruined the man who loved you; but if you choose, let it be so; and years hence tell me if you have been repaid for the sacrifice."

She was weeping so wildly, and her tears did not flow without terrible pain, that he was forced to soothe her. He held her to his breast, murmuring endearing words, until she grew calm again, and listened to his persuasions and plans without a word of remonstrance, or a thought of the wrong she was doing.

Suddenly there was a sound of voices in the hall, which made Mabel start up in affright; but before either could turn or speak, the door was thrown open, and Mr. Meredith entered the apartment.

He saw them both; his astonished eyes took all in at a glance. Pale and stern, he moved toward them, saying in a terrible voice:

"You here? I warned you!"

Montgomery returned his glance, and kept his arm around Mabel, when she would have shrunk from his embrace.

"Let go that girl!" exclaimed Meredith. "Mabel, quit that man, instantly!"

She did not speak—she was almost fainting. Meredith put out his hand and forced her away. She sunk into a seat unable to speak, looking at both those infuriated men with a wild terror in her eyes.

"Leave this house," said Mr. Meredith, "or I will have you put out of it."

"I will go, undoubtedly," answered the young man, "but that young lady goes with me."

"Mabel, what does this mean? What is this man to you?"

She could not utter a sound, but sat pale and frightened, looking piteously on her father.

"She is my betrothed wife," returned Montgomery.

Meredith was silent for a moment, then he exclaimed:

"I understand this; you have done it to wound me—me."

Montgomery smiled—that cold smile which came so seldom.

"Mabel," continued Mr. Meredith, struggling for composure, "I will forgive you everything, if you promise never to see this man again."

"I can not," she moaned; "oh, I can not."

"Be careful," he said, slowly; "you do not know what you are doing! I will forgive you—I, who never forgave before. Make your choice."

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" she cried, passionately.

"I will—I do—only tell this man to go."

"Mabel!" whispered Montgomery.

She raised herself in her chair as if forced by some power which could not be disobeyed.

"I cannot," she exclaimed. "Any thing else—I can not."

"Do you know who he is?" questioned Meredith.

"A nameless wretch—an actor—a—"

"You forgot one other title," interrupted Montgomery, coldly. "I had almost forgotten it myself."

Meredith made an imperious gesture with his hand.

"Mabel, decide!" he said. "Remember, it is forever. If you hesitate, I leave you to your fate."

"I love him," broke from her white lips. "I love him!"

Montgomery turned upon the unhappy man.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

The proud man turned away. That pale, weeping girl was the last object in life to which he could cling. He would not relinquish her without another trial.

"Mabel," he cried out, suddenly, "hear the truth: that man is dishonest, dishonored."

She only stared at him, wondering if she had suddenly lost her reason, while Montgomery stood before his accuser, perfectly calm. He would have suffered eternal torture, rather than betray the agony those words gave him.

"Twelve years ago," pursued Meredith, in the same unnatural voice, "I expelled him from my confidence—"

Montgomery started forward. "Hold, sir!"

"Mabel, this is false! That man always hated me; he made my life a torture. If I had been as wicked as he says, it would have been his fault."

"Dishonorable!" gasped Mabel; "dishonest!"

"Once again," cried Meredith, "I command you to leave."

"Not without her," answered the young man.

Meredith turned to his daughter; his face was pale; his voice trembled.

"I have no more to say," he continued, relapsing into a stony coldness. "Decide now and forever. Go with him or give him up."

The young girl raised herself with despairing energy.

"I cannot give him up," she cried, wringing her hands wildly; "it would kill me! Let me plead for him; for my sake, forgive him; for my sake, save him!"

"Stop, Mabel!" exclaimed Montgomery. "I will not forgive him. The wrong is on my side. This man never shall have my pardon. You forsake him or me! Your choice!"

"He is my father," she almost shrieked, "remember that."

She stood between them, wringing her hands and imploring them, with frantic words, but they remained unmoved as two statues under the passion of her speech, so different, and yet so like, in their hardness.

"No more, Mabel," exclaimed Mr. Meredith. "I will not hear a word more. Leave this house, young man!"

Montgomery turned toward the girl.

"Come, Mabel," he said; "come."

She did not stir; Mr. Meredith extended his hand.

"Come to your father, Mabel."

She hesitated still, her poor heart wrung with terrible emotions, torn with contending love.

"Mabel, my wife!" whispered the young man.

With a low cry, she flung herself upon his breast.

"I must go with him," she cried; "I must go with him."

Not a sign of emotion escaped Meredith. He seated himself quietly, and waved his hand toward the door.

"Take her away," he said; "I could not curse you or her as you have cursed yourselves."

Montgomery drew the shivering young creature toward the door, but she broke from his hold, and rushed back to Meredith, flinging herself at his feet, and clasping his knees with her arms.

"Only forgive me! I will give you my life—every thing—say that you forgive us."

He lifted his white face, and his voice came clear and distinct:

"I do not know you—I do not know him."

Montgomery came forward and raised her from the floor; she fell back in his arms insensible, and he bore her from the house.

Mr. Meredith sat there, motionless, till night came on. The last blow had fallen, but he did not relent.

Once he muttered:

"Eleanor! Eleanor! all forsake me now; will you go, too?" but that was all.

There he sat, hopeless, solitary, bitterly wronged, and at the same time culpable and unjust. Life had nothing left for him now, but he would meet this last tempest as he had encountered former ones; it might crush him, but he would die and make no sign. Twilight gathered and filled the apartment with its gloom; there was no sound throughout the house. The servants below knew what had happened, and sat together conversing in mysterious whispers while their master kept his vigil in the darkness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WIFE.

MABEL found herself in the house of a clergyman, where Montgomery had driven on leaving Mr. Meredith's dwelling. She had offered no resistance—she hardly understood his explanation of where they were going, or the reason therefor.

He led her into the parlor and seated her by the fire, for she was shivering from head to foot.

"I will come back in a moment," he said.

She clung to his hand, as a drowning man might grasp at a straw, murmuring:

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me!"

"It is only for an instant, darling. I want to speak to the clergyman."

"The clergyman!" she repeated.

"Yes; he will marry us at once. Are you frightened, Mabel? Do you repent?"

She shook her head, with a smile.

"Not that; but it is so terrible. My father—my father!"

"Never speak that name again, Mabel," he said, passionately; "I never wish to think of him henceforth."

She only shuddered, and cowered down toward the fire.

"Tell me," he said, "have you decided—would you go back to him—would you leave me?"

He knelt down by her, and laid her face upon his shoulder.

"Speak, Mabel."

"I have decided," she said, brokenly; "I will be your wife."

He forced her gently back in the chair, took off her bonnet, and smoothed her hair softly as a woman could have done, and left the room.

Mabel's mind was in such utter confusion that she could not have told whether she was left alone for moments or hours. She was only conscious of a troubled whirl of thought like the rush of waters, without being able to settle upon any. Many times she repeated, in a despairing sort of way:

"Father! father!" But she hardly appeared to realize the meaning of her own words.

After a time the door opened, and Montgomery returned.

"The clergyman is coming, Mabel," he said, lifting her out of the chair with the tenderness a mother might have given her child.

His face was all aglow with triumph, and though his eyes turned on her with a love which was beautiful and sincere, the smile with which he had parted from her father still lingered upon his lips.

"Come, Mabel," he whispered, "be brave; my own now—all my own."

The minister entered, accompanied by a couple of the members of his household to serve as witnesses, and the ceremony was performed which joined that young pair for all time, and in violation of many sacred ties.

The rite was over, and that reckless man folded her to his heart with infinite tenderness. That instant his whole being was given to love.

"My wife! my wife!"

The words came upon his lips with a force and reality which no previous word or occurrence of the day had done. She forced herself to grow strong—allowed him to put on her bonnet and shawl, and to lead her back to the carriage.

"Where are we going now?" she whispered, as they drove away.

"Home, darling—home at last!"

So Mabel was married, and the new life she had made for herself began.

For several days Montgomery was at leisure, and every moment was devoted to his wife. His love for her was real and intense. For the time her happiness was complete. She forgot the past, the future—the whole world was centered in that bewilder bliss.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ENCHANTRESS DISENCHANTED.

It was Mrs. Eastman's reception-day. The suit of rooms she occupied at the hotel was filled with that luxurious twilight which a woman who studies effects of light and shade knows so well how to produce. She had been unusually anxious that morning, and arranged the ornaments with her own hands, finding it very difficult to satisfy herself with the result produced. With this woman, beauty, in all its exquisite forms, was simply an instrument. She had no genuine love for it, but studied its various combinations as a man becomes acquainted with the tools that are to turn his time into gold.

The lady was very glad to keep a man like Montgomery—handsome, accomplished and famous—in her train of admirers. Indeed, so far as she had a heart, it went to this young man. Frothy and frivolous as were the compliments which passed between them, a current of deeper feeling ran underneath, on the lady's side at least. But it was not for him she arranged those purple easy-chairs, and filled the foreign vases with flowers. It was not for him she swept down the masses of amber-tinted drapery over the windows, allowing the light to creep in through waves of frost-like lace. It was not for him that she contrasted those shining braids of hair with crimson berries and leaves so bright that they seemed freshly dipped in running water. The dress of rustling silk, and that cobweb lace that shaded her neck, were intended to entrance a richer prize than the young actor, who was, as she said, a splendid creature every way, only what a pity it was that such men could give neither position or wealth in return for the adoration so many women were ready to lavish upon them. Indeed, it was not exactly at her reception that she cared most to receive young Montgomery. He was a charming person to know, but not to introduce—people had such unreasonable prejudices about the stage.

No, no. It was altogether a different person for whom Mrs. Eastman completed that elaborate toilet, and filled her rooms with flowers. She had chanced that morning to see Mr. Meredith going up from the railway station, and fancied that he would come with his daughter, when that young lady made her usual call. With all her frivolous romance, the widow had a firm eye to business, and Mr. Meredith was the most wealthy and unincumbered person in her circle of friends. It was this consideration which led to the very intimate acquaintance which had sprung up between this scheming woman and Mabel. Give a sharp, handsome, scheming woman of the world a domestic foothold in your household, and ten chances to one the widower or bachelor who presides there will accept his destiny without an idea that he has not chosen it from the first.

But there was a single drawback to Mrs. Eastman's scheme. Meredith had once loved with his whole heart and soul, and this is a sort of passion

from which one does not recover easily. The man who had loved Eleanor Mitchell was not likely to fall back to the level of Mrs. Eastman.

But Mrs. Eastman was ignorant of these important facts, and imagined herself to have made considerable headway in her project of aggrandizement. So she opened her day with unusual brilliancy, and, flushed with a consciousness that all her luxurious surroundings must have the due effect, flung her rooms open.

Mrs. Eastman was very popular in society, and soon a troop of gay visitors thronged her rooms.

She was in unusual spirits that morning, and the life of the circle.

"The strangest thing has happened!" exclaimed a new-comer, as soon as he had finished his salutations; "have you heard it?"

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Eastman, "we are famished for news. Tell us it at once."

"I'll give you three guesses," said the visitor, "and then I'll wager you don't hit it."

"Somebody has proved an honest politician," said Mrs. Eastman, and there was a general laugh at the gentleman's expense, in which he joined.

"Not yet?" he said; "try again."

"Do tell us, you provoking creature!" she exclaimed.

"Young Montgomery, the actor, was married last night."

Mrs. Eastman grew pale; you could see it even in that rich light.

"Nonsense!" she said; "I saw him yesterday morning."

"I can't help that; it's true. Look at the paper for yourself. He ran off with that beautiful Mabel Meredith."

Mrs. Eastman still wore a smile of disbelief.

"I expect Mabel here every moment," she said; "wait and hear what she says to the report."

"I doubt your seeing her. But bring the paper."

Somebody snatched a newspaper from the table, and called:

"Here it is! 'Married—Charles Montgomery, to Miss—'"

Mrs. Eastman snatched the paper, and glanced over the advertisement. The lines whirled before her sight, but in a second there came the recollection of the curious eyes that were upon her—anything rather than endure their ridicule.

She burst into a merry laugh, and allowed the paper to fall at her feet.

"Upon my word," she exclaimed, "that is the most exquisite joke of the season. Fancy Mr. Meredith's rage."

Everybody laughed, and with the usual heartlessness of idle people, began speculating upon the chance of reconciliation, and making merry over what affected more nearly than any other act the lives of that young pair.

"Mr. Meredith never will forgive him," said Mr. Osborne, the gentleman who brought the news; "he is a very obstinate man."

"Dreadfully!" returned Mrs. Eastman; "you might as well try to move Mont Blanc as change him."

"I pity the foolish girl," some one said; "a more fickle, heartless man than Montgomery never lived."

"Think of living in high tragedy all the time!"

"Let us hope he won't beat her," said Mrs. Eastman, with another laugh.

She sat there calm and smiling, to all outward appearance, but her hands had clenched themselves in her lap till the lace handkerchief she held was torn in a dozen places.

"It would not surprise me if he left her in six months," said Mr. Osborne.

Mrs. Eastman looked up with a peculiar smile:

"Give him a year!" said she, "give him a year."

More visitors entered, and the group broke up. There was no relief for the woman—she must sit there her allotted time, exchanging laughing words, looking brilliant and gay, while all the while the pangs of mortified vanity and pride were tugging at her heart.

There was no time to think even when the reception was over; she was going out to dinner—from there to a ball, and had only time to dress, in a state of wild, almost unendurable excitement.

It was almost morning when she reached home. She dismissed her maid, with a feeling of satisfaction in being able to speak ill-humoredly to some one, and sunk to an ottoman by the smoldering fire, and with both hands locked over her knees, fell into a train of bitter thought.

She looked wan and tired in the gh stly fire-light; she was alone, and there was no necessity for schooling her face any longer. Her fingers knotted themselves together, and her brows contracted, as she looked back upon the past weeks. Never had her vanity received a shock like that; and, more than all, such fragments of a heart as she had left were wounded to the core.

She really loved Montgomery, and believed him completely the slave of her attractions. Not that she would have married him; even if another match had not aroused her ambition, no affection would have induced her to run any risk of losing caste; but he was the idol of the day, petted and flattered, and it had been very pleasant to have him follow her with adulation so many were eager to wrest from her.

"That little baby-faced thing!" she exclaimed. "To think of my being so deceived!"

She quite overlooked the fact that she had deceived herself, and her anger against Mabel, who was perfectly innocent of offense where she was concerned, by far exceeded the irritation she felt toward Montgomery.

"I will be revenged before I am a year older!" she said, aloud, rising from her chair. "She has left

her home, and such a home—never on this earth shall she return to it. There, at least, I will reign!"

She partly arose, and caught sight of her face in the mirror over the mantel; it looked so worn that she turned her eyes away, and sat down shivering.

She crept to bed. Sleep came, and she carried with her into her dreams the evil thoughts she had indulged during that lonely reverie.

Had Mabel seen her then, she might well have trembled for her new happiness. She had made a dangerous and unprincipled foe.

Montgomery and his young wife left town suddenly, and in the Southern city to which his profession led him, Mabel received a long letter from Mrs. Eastman, chiding and praising her in a breath, reproaching her most for not having confided in one who loved her so dearly.

Mabel gave the letter to her husband.

"Isn't she kind; I'm sorry now that I did not like her better."

Montgomery smiled. He probably had a clearer insight into the feelings of the writer than his young wife; but he offered no remark.

"You will be certain to meet her somewhere," was all he said, as he laid the letter down, wondering to himself if Mrs. Eastman remembered a variety of little perfumed billets with which she had favored him in times gone by.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENCHANTRESS IN BLACK.

MRS. EASTMAN, even in the midst of her disappointment regarding Montgomery's marriage, began to tie up the broken threads of her calculations anew, with her first waking thoughts. Her great object had been rather advanced than otherwise by the unpropitious marriage of Mr. Meredith's daughter. The rich man was now alone, shattered in his affections, open to sympathy. Mabel's place was empty in that almost regal household. Who should fill it? The lady rose up in bed, and looked at herself in an opposite mirror. The reflection was not satisfactory; it seldom was before the first toilet duties were accomplished.

"No matter," she thought, falling back on her pillow, "I have manner, style, tact, everything that insures success in this world. These will stand me instead of youth, which, after all, is full of blunders. I wonder if he will call to-day; if not—"

A clock in the next room chimed a late hour in the morning. She started up and began to dress hurriedly.

"He is an early riser. He may come at any moment. What a drone I am, and so much at stake, too!"

She rose hastily, rung for her maid, and commenced her toilet. She was very difficult to please that morning—as is so often the case, the poor servant had to pay for her mistress's nervousness and excitability.

Dressed she was at last, and, her chocolate taken, she went into her pretty morning room, to await the arrival she so anxiously expected. Several visitors came, but not the one she desired, and when dinner-time arrived this close calculator was forced to acknowledge that for once she had been mistaken in her anticipations. Mr. Meredith did not come near her either for information or sympathy.

But while pondering the matter in her mind that night, and trying to devise some scheme which would place her once more in communication with him, she recollects Eleanor Mitchell. Some time after giving the package of papers to her in Italy, she had discovered others of still greater importance to that unhappy lady, but through indolence and forgetfulness she had never taken the trouble to seek for Mrs. Mitchell's address, in order to send them to her.

In her anxiety for some excuse by which she could carry out her plans, she recollects that Mr. Meredith had known Mrs. Mitchell, and was in some way connected with the trouble which had wrecked the poor woman's life. She would go to him with those papers, and ask his advice; nothing would be more natural.

It was, for her, a very early hour the next morning when Mrs. Eastman presented herself at Mr. Meredith's house. She was shown into the library, and sat down, with a beating heart, to await the upshot of her scheme. Probably her plans were vague, but they all centered upon one point—to put forth all her powers of fascination, and bring Mr. Meredith within their control.

He came in, colder and sterner-looking than ever. This last great trouble was to be borne in silence, as all others had been. Mrs. Eastman knew the man with whom she had to deal, and attempted no commonplace sympathy; she said nothing upon the subject, and did not even mention Mabel's name; but she managed, as an artful woman can, to make her sympathies felt.

"The servant said that you wished to see me on business," he remarked, rather abruptly, but making an effort to be cheerful; "I thought that was a word you did not admit in your vocabulary."

"I do not," she replied, feeling more at her ease; "it was advice I came for. You know what a foolish, helpless creature I am, Mr. Meredith—such a child."

He was too sore, too sick at heart, to pay any attention to those childish ways, and grew impatient of them.

"Any advice that I can give will be cheerfully offered," he said. "What did you wish to consult me about?"

She felt a little annoyed. Still it was something to have seen him, and made him understand that she felt for him in his affliction. She must trust to her own tact for more.

"I was sure of that when I came to you," she

said; "you have always been a kind friend to me—so kind."

He bowed only. He could not talk commonplaces that day.

"Besides that, it seemed as if you were a proper person to consult here. You know the lady concerned much better than I."

He waited for her to continue; there was evidently to be no opportunity for a display of her histrionic abilities, so she was forced to go quietly on with her business.

"Some time since I met a Mrs. Mitchell in Italy," she said, quickly.

He started then—it was only for an instant; before she looked toward him he had recovered his composure.

"I had found among my husband's papers some letters which concerned her, and I gave them to her, poor thing."

"So she told me," he said, with a slight quiver in his voice.

"Then you have seen her?" she asked. "You can tell me her address, perhaps."

"I do not know that, but I can probably obtain it from her lawyer."

"I am so glad—so very glad!"

"Have you any communication of importance to make her?" he asked, with more interest than he had before exhibited.

"Yes! yes! The other day I was obliged to hunt over a box of dusty papers for my dreadful lawyer, and I came upon a packet for Mrs. Mitchell. It was important, I am sure; you know how people talked—how—"

"I know; but please go on! These papers—"

"Would, I think, be proofs sufficient to reinstate her perfectly, even in the opinion of those who were hardest against her."

He rose quickly. She was fairly startled at the change which had come over him.

"You have those papers?" he asked, quickly.

At that moment something flashed upon her which she had not dreamed before—if the papers had been left at home, poor Eleanor Mitchell would never have received any benefit from them. But for once craft had outwitted itself. Mrs. Eastman had put them in a pretty little affair, half purse half reticule, that she might give them into Meredith's own hands, and so be remembered pleasantly in his mind in contrast to the troubles about him, as a woman eager to render kindness to a suffering sister.

The reticule had fallen open on the floor. Mr. Meredith could see the papers, for the golden clasp had been unloosed in the fall—there was no help.

"Here are the papers," he continued, hurriedly.

Mrs. Eastman could utter no denial; she could only allow him to pick up the pretty receptacle and draw out the package.

He partially opened the envelope, then closed it again.

"I have no right to look at them," he said; "they must be seen by her first; but have no fear; they shall be placed safe in the lady's hand, if I travel over the earth for it."

"If you will give me her lawyer's address," she said, quickly, "I will take them to him."

"Let me do it," he replied. "I must find her. Every hour's delay is one of agony to Eleanor."

She repeated the name in angry surprise.

"You must have known Mrs. Mitchell very intimately," she said.

"I did, very intimately, at one time, but it is long ago. I can not thank you enough for having brought those papers. If they are what you suppose, it will make more than one heart happy."

Mrs. Eastman's eyes looked eagerly toward the package—how her fingers tingled to once more get them within reach!

"You feel very deeply in regard to it," she said.

"And well I may! I have never been free from trouble on her account. She is a noble, wronged woman. Mrs. Eastman, you will have done the work of an angel, if these papers set her right with the world—freed even from the shadow of reproach. It is a wonderful, wonderful blessing."

"I am glad to have been the means of bringing you a little happiness," she said, in her softest voice.

"Thank you; God bless you!" he replied, earnestly.

"If this be true, you have indeed brought me great happiness—the safety and peace of the only woman I ever did, or ever shall love."

He held the papers close and turned away for a moment. The room whirled with Mrs. Eastman; in her mortification and rage, it seemed as if she must faint, then and there. She rose from her seat, pale, even through the artificial tint that dyed her cheeks, but Meredith did not notice it. His own nature was too deeply stirred. He took her hand and wrung the delicately gloved fingers with passionate violence. His proud lips quivered; his eyes shone.

"You found me a solitary, hopeless man, betrayed in my affections, every way without a hope, almost without a wish; my home desolate, the past a cloud, my future a blank. You leave me vigorous, with a new expectation. Oh, lady, lady, if you but knew what happiness these papers may bring to persons who have not deserved their hard fate, you would indeed recognize your own angel work. Some day, when Eleanor takes her place by my side, we will thank you for this together."

Mrs. Eastman wrenched her hand from his clasp, her lips grew pale under the smile she had forced to them, but she made a graceful acknowledgment for his thankfulness, and left the room, crushing the pretty reticule in her hand till its frail clasp broke.

CHAPTER XV.

SHADOWS.

Six months had passed; it was now June. Montgomery had again returned to New York to

play his last engagement for the summer, and Mabel accompanied him. They were alone in their apartments that bright morning which made even the dull streets of the city beautiful, and seemed to promise peace to all the earth.

Montgomery was lying upon the sofa, idly smoking a cigar, and watching the wreaths curl into fantastic shapes above his head. He looked a little worn and harassed, although he had lost none of the proud, manly beauty which was his peculiar characteristic.

Mabel sat by the window, her hands idly crossed in her lap, unlike her old industrious and active habits, and her eyes wandered listlessly about, kindling into sudden anxiety when they rested upon her husband.

The change in her face showed the alteration which had taken place in her life. She looked older, more womanly, and more beautiful, but the dreamy peace which had so softened her features in those girlish days was gone forever.

For the first two months after her marriage, she had been perfectly happy; but from that time the shadows began rapidly to obscure the sunlight in which her heart had started with a new growth. She had begun to realize how cruel she had been to the father who had cherished her so tenderly.

In the southern cities where Montgomery had been fulfilling engagements, his poor young wife had been very lonely and depressed by a sense of her own selfish conduct. She had left her father in utter solitude of heart, to find herself more solitary still. In every place he visited, Montgomery found himself among a set of idle young men who had formerly been his companions, who absorbed his time and won him into forgetfulness of the fair girl whose destiny lay with him. Mabel went often to the theater, for his acting still possessed for her its first charm and power. It had been his habit, when the performance was over, to come to the box for her; but one night, after waiting until the crowd had dispersed, she was obliged to send him word that she was waiting. The messenger came back with the information that Mr. Montgomery had left the theater.

She went home and sat expecting him until day broke, fancying all sorts of terrible things, and working herself into a fever of anxiety that made her quite ill.

When he came home, very late at night, she did what any young girl would have done under the circumstances, wept bitterly, and irritated him beyond endurance by her grief.

He was impatient with her, and after he had fallen asleep, she sat watching his noble form in its repose, almost ready to believe that the whole might have been only a bad dream.

Poor Mabel had plenty of time for reflection, which almost deepened into remorse, before she had been six months married. Perhaps her greatest curse was that she still loved her husband devotedly, but in her solitude the old love for father and home came back with such bitter longing, that even then and there, regrets grew strong and tortured her. It does not always require some great moral convulsion to punish wrong-doing. Little things can accumulate into retribution.

So, roaming from city to city, spending nights and days in railroad cars, and never, in any instance, having even the semblance of a home, that delicately nurtured girl saw the joys of her married life fast verging into those coarse common-place ways of existence that are worse than poverty a thousand fold. Never staying in one place long enough to make a female friend, she had no associates, and in her utter isolation, the poor wife had plenty of time for those bitter thoughts which deep love alone saved from being utter misery.

All this was, in a great degree, consequent on Montgomery's profession. The very genius that he threw into it absorbed him, and in the passion of his mimic love, he sometimes forgot the sweet and pure happiness which might have been so real. Mabel had not considered this when she so madly left her magnificent home to be the wife of a popular actor. Poverty she might have put up with cheerfully, little as she had ever known what it really was. But this fantastic life among trunks, spangles and stage-effects, almost disgusted her. True, she loved her husband, and he loved her—she did not doubt that—but it was a hard trial for a sensitive, delicate girl to be dragged through the coarse details of stage business every day of her life. He had the excitements of his profession; she had nothing but its coarse realities. No wonder that she almost withered away!

Still, Montgomery was good to her when he had time for a moment of domestic quiet. But it was useless to conceal it, when her own pale face so clearly developed the painful truth. Poor Mabel was reaping a wild harvest of trouble for her disobedience and sin.

"You seem very silent this morning," Montgomery said, suddenly rousing himself.

She smiled patiently.

"I thought you were busy thinking over your new part," she answered.

"Do you suppose I always have such nonsense in my head? It aches badly enough without that."

"Can I do any thing for you?" she asked.

"I suppose that is by way of heaping coals of fire on my head for coming in late," he said, with a careless good-nature; "it won't do, my dear, so don't trouble yourself to try it."

She was glad to hear him speak so pleasantly; usually, after having performed an arduous task, he came home in a sort of dreary silence, that was wont to end in an outbreak of temper.

While she was wondering what to say next, fearful of disturbing him either by her words or her si-

lence, the servant entered. Mrs. Eastman wished to see her.

Mabel started up really delighted. She had never seen Mrs. Eastman since her marriage, and she had so few friends, that her coming was welcomed as a relief to the not too light-hearted wife? Was it welcomed by Montgomery? Mrs. Eastman entered, as gay in dress and blithe in spirit as a Southern bird. Her grace, her manner, and her subject-matter of communication—all were commissioned to work her woman-of-the-world's charm. Montgomery received her, at first, somewhat coldly—Mabel warmly. Ere long, Mrs. Eastman opened the way to the actor's heart by pretty compliments, cunningly-devised criticisms, deftly-planned stratagems, and Mabel beheld, with some concern, the power which her visitor possessed over the man whom she, as a wife, could not command.

An hour flew by quickly, when the visitor rose to go. She pressed Mabel to visit her, as of old, giving promise of gay times and change—just what Mabel most needed; still, the young wife felt ill at ease under the pressing offers of the dashing widow. In her heart a dread—a fear—a sense of danger, never before there, became a palpable thing.

Mrs. Eastman departed. Montgomery soon rose to follow, offering as his apology, that he was required at the theater, as rehearsal hour had come. He passed out, and soon was on his way down Broadway. Was it by chance or by design that Mrs. Eastman's carriage stood before him ere he had proceeded a half-dozen squares? Was it fate which impelled him to enter the vehicle, and, with the fascinating woman, to drive away from the city up to the great park, where several hours of uninterrupted conversation might be had?

The poor wife would have trembled to the tread of the horses' hoofs, and her tears would have fallen in agonizing showers, had she known that the tempter was, indeed, at her spells.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHASING AFTER A HOPE.

AND Eleanor Mitchell, during all this season where was she?

A few miles back of Marysville there stood an humble ranch, the property of two brothers, who had come thither from the Atlantic States.

It was the place that Eleanor sought. Margaret Hawkins lived there with her grandsons, and this woman held Eleanor's last hope in her hand.

From the hour that she landed in San Francisco, Eleanor had taken no rest. During the voyage, she had borne up with a strength which seemed born of fever; silent, enduring, passing her days in pacing the deck, and her nights in sleepless endeavors to subdue the wild thoughts which darkened about her.

Once on shore, desperate fortitude appeared to give way. She would hear of no pause, no hindrance. The instant a conveyance could be procured, she was on her road. Even in her feverish absence of mind, her old thoughtfulness, where others were concerned, did not desert her. She insisted upon her faithful attendant remaining behind, but Morgan would not hear of it.

"If you can bear it, ma'am, I can," was all she said. "I ain't a-going to see you start on such a journey without me, and that's all there is about it; so don't say another word."

So they started. In after years Eleanor wondered how she lived through those days; they were worse than all she had before endured.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached Marysville. Eleanor was within three miles of her destination. She crouched down in the seat, shivering with dread, pressing her hands hard together, and making every effort to cling to her senses, which seemed deserting her. She would have given worlds to shriek madly. She had an insane desire to spring from the carriage and rush away on foot, but then she crouched lower and lower, muffling her face in her cloak, and feeling the hot fever of one intense desire coursing faster and faster through her veins.

An exclamation from her companion made her raise her eyes—they were driving up to the ranch.

The carriage stopped before the entrance, and all the inmates of the house came swarming out to regard the unusual sight.

There was an expression of such terrible agony in Eleanor's face, that Mrs. Morgan seized her hands in affright.

"Let me speak," she said. "We want Mr. Hawkins."

"That is my name," answered a man, coming up to the carriage in a state of utter astonishment.

"Your—your—" Eleanor gasped, but she could not utter another syllable.

"Your mother lives with you," said Mrs. Morgan; "we want to see her."

The man turned away his head, and the woman, who had also come up, put her apron to her eyes.

"She did live with me," he said, "but she died more than a month ago. Did you know my mother, marm?"

Eleanor sprung to her feet with a shriek so thrillingly painful that it was echoed by half a dozen voices.

"Dead!" she cried. "No, no, not dead!"

She fell back again, helpless, but terribly conscious.

"Help me to get her in the house," pleaded Mrs. Morgan, earnestly. "She is sick. We will pay you any thing—any thing."

They carried Eleanor into the house, and placed her in a chair, everybody running in a different way for they did not know what, as people always do when frightened.

Eleanor beckoned the man to her. She must

speak at once—she knew a few moments of consciousness only were left to her."

"I am Mrs. Mitchell. Did your mother ever mention me?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the woman, before her husband could speak; "she talked about you when she was sick. She lived with you once."

"Yes; and the child—did she speak of the child?"

"Jim would know," said the woman, turning to her husband. "Jim's got all her papers."

"Papers!" cried Eleanor. "What papers?"

"We don't know, ma'am," said the man. "Mother was old and queer; she wouldn't talk only to Jim. There was something about you she told him, but I never could get a word out of her."

"Where is your brother?" asked Mrs. Morgan. "Call him at once, for the love of Heaven, call him."

"He sailed for Amsterdam the week after mother died," answered the man. "He only stayed here for her sake."

There was another shuddering sob, and Eleanor Mitchell fell senseless upon the floor. That last shock had been more than she could bear at once. Mind and body had given way at last.

They raised her, and laid her upon a bed. When she recovered from that deathlike swoon, she was raving in a brain fever, which held her in its grasp for many long weeks.

When the fever had spent its fire, it was long before her strength came back; but from the first she fastened upon one idea, to which she clung tenaciously. She would go in pursuit of that man, if he was anywhere upon the face of the earth—she must find him. She had no hope now; she found there had been one in her heart before, but the mad anxiety was there in all its force. She must learn her child's fate—she could die then—she asked nothing but this.

Long before any one, to look at her attenuated form, would have believed her capable of the slightest exertion, she took her way back to San Francisco, and the first ship that sailed bore her away, still accompanied by her faithful attendant.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

It was winter again—more than a year since Mabel left her father's house; a year in which had been crowded so much excitement, and such varied experiences, that the very months seemed like years, as she looked back upon them.

That had been an anxious, miserable summer, after meeting Mrs. Eastman in New York. Bitterly had the woman repaid her for the wrong which she considered herself to have received at Mabel's hand.

She gained for the time a great influence over Montgomery, fleeting of course, but powerful, from his habit of yielding to excitement of any kind. With it all, she kept up a semblance of affection for Mabel, which at last became utterly loathsome to its object, although she bore in silence, lest she should estrange her husband still more from her.

It was winter now, as I have said, and Mabel was just recovering from a severe illness, looking thin and pale, but more lovely than ever, as she leaned back among the cushions with her tiny babe nestled close to her heart.

More than ever, since the birth of her child, had Mabel reflected upon her conduct to her father, and still more terrible had seemed to her the estrangement and feud between them.

"If he should ever live to hate his child!" she said to herself, again and again. "Oh, that would be a harder punishment than I could bear. If the child, in coming years, should turn on me, as I defiled him, how could I bear it and live?"

The very thought was insupportable, and yet it would recur with the pertinacity with which an idea will fix itself upon the mind of an invalid.

Montgomery had been kinder and more gentle with her of late, and she was very grateful to him; her proud spirit was so subdued, and the duty she owed as a wife was so strong in her mind, that she welcomed back his attentions with every evidence of patience and affectionate kindness.

While she sat there watching her baby in his slumber, whispering to him, cooing over him, like a bird, her husband entered with his usual impetuosity, calling out:

"Mabel, Mabel!"

She put up her hand, warningly.

"Don't wake baby," she whispered.

"Oh, is that young-music box asleep?" he said; "upon my word, you make a very pretty picture."

He was in high spirits, evidently somewhat excited.

"I have just got a telegram from Richmond," he said; "they want me, at once."

"But you can not go yet," she said, anxiously.

"Yes, I can; I didn't tell you, but I quarreled with Old Bond, last night, and broke my engagement. I shall start to-morrow."

"Oh, no, no," she pleaded; "I can not travel yet—the baby could not stand it."

"I should think not," he said, laughing. "I want you to stay quietly here, like a good child. I shall be back in two months, at the furthest, and I shall make a great deal of money."

"You won't leave me?" she said. "Only wait a week—I shall be able to travel by that time."

"My dear little puss," he said, sitting down beside her with his old endearing manner, "it would be madness for you to attempt to go—you must not do it."

"But I can not stay alone here," she said; "you know I have no friends, no acquaintances."

"Are you reminding me again that you lost all those by marrying me?" he asked, sternly.

"You know I did not mean that—I never say or

think such things—you know I do not! But think how lonely I shall be!"

"Why, you will have baby for company—little prince, that he is! Besides all the rest, Mabel, I want money, confoundedly."

"But you have made so much during the last year—"

"There, there, don't preach. I must go, and there's no use groaning. I am going to be good and stay at home more, after this trip—I am indeed."

"If you would," she ventured to say, "for baby's sake."

"Oh, yes, baby shall be rich, and have no occasion to wear the buskin. I half wish I was out of it."

She shuddered at the bare idea. Every thing connected with the stage had become so distasteful to her that any allusion to it, as associated with her child, was very painful.

"I think you ought to be in bed, Mabel."

"No, I feel quite strong to-day. But you were not in earnest—you will not go to-morrow?"

"I must, Mabel—this is really childish! We must live; this is too good an engagement to throw aside for a whim."

"It is not a whim," she said; "you know it is not. I ought to go with you on such a journey. These times are perilous, and I should be with you."

"Upon my word, one would suppose I was a child that could not be trusted alone," he said, in an irritated tone. "I wonder I ever got along at all, before I married you!"

"Don't be harsh with me," she said; "please don't!"

"There, there, be a good child!"

He stooped over, and kissed her forehead.

"Now don't entertain this foolish idea of peril," he said, looking at the baby, as a man always does, as if he were some peculiar piece of machinery that might get out of order at any moment.

"If you would only wait a week—"

"And so lose the engagement—sensible, certainly!"

"You have offers enough here."

"But none so good as this, you know that yourself. Now, Mabel, it is of no use to say any thing more about the matter—I am going to-morrow."

She knew that to argue further would be worse than folly, perhaps only end in his parting from her in anger. She choked back her tears, as well as she was able, saying only:

"At least, mayn't I come as soon as I am able?"

"It would be the height of folly; I shall be ready to come back by that time."

There Mabel would not wholly yield.

"I shall not promise that you will not see me," she said.

He dismissed the idea as quickly as possible.

"You will stay here," he added; "the house is very comfortable—the weeks will slip away before you know it."

She shook her head, sadly, but further words were worse than useless.

"I will do the best I can," she said; "but oh, Charles, when those Southern men come about you, think of your child. The times are so full of excitement, oh, I pray you be careful; be wise; be true to yourself, and to our future!"

"I am going to be as steady as a judge," he said; "never fear for me. Richmond is wild with excitement, and that is just the reason they want me. Theaters always prosper in such an atmosphere."

He left her soon after to make preparations for his journey, and she was forced to regard it as a matter settled beyond the possibility of change.

He did start the next morning, and Mabel was all alone. That very day she happened to take up a Richmond paper which her husband had left in his room. It announced the arrival of "Mrs. Eastman and a brilliant party who had come to share the fortunes of the State, and to enliven the capital with their presence." The journal fell from her hands—she grew faint with the sickening jealousy that came over her.

Her agitation threw her back again, and for several days she was quite ill. Nothing kept up her courage but the sight of her child. Without that, she could gladly have turned upon her pillow and died.

She besieged the doctor for permission to start, and he, at last, feared the excitement she was laboring under would be worse than the fatigue she might endure, and some weeks after she set out herself upon the journey to the South. The air was filled with the wild alarms of war, but what were these to the war of emotions going on within her heart? She would dare all—even her husband's anger—to be with him again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWO WORLDS OF HUMAN LIFE.

ANSON MEREDITH was living in his lonely house in the country; he had retired there soon after his rupture with Mabel, and had hardly left it since.

A long, dreary year it had been to him, solitary, desolate man! It was hard for his pride to support him, then; this last blow had crushed him more than all the troubles which had gone before. The hope which Mrs. Eastman's papers had inspired was dying out. No news of Miss. Mitchell had reached him from any quarter. The old house was fuller than ever of painful recollections, yet he could not bear to leave it. There he lived, day after day, thinking of his blighted youth and Eleanor; of the girl whom he had so idolized and indulged, and who had repaid his affection with such duplicity. Mabel had been to him the last heart anchor. That, too, had given way, and without affection, life has but husks and ashes for the proudest man on earth.

Twice Mabel had written to him without her husband's knowledge; but when Meredith saw her writing upon the envelope, he had burned the letters unread. After that there was no fresh occurrence to throw him back upon the past—nothing but that dreary living on from day to day, hoping against hope, that time might restore Eleanor to her friends. One morning, while seated in his library, he heard a carriage drive up to the door. Visitors rarely came now, for he had been resolute in his determination not to receive any one—he almost dreaded the sight of a human face, and used sometimes to wish for a refuge in some vast Canadian wilderness, beyond the sight and sound of man.

Presently the door opened, and his servant entered, saying:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but there's a lady says she must see you."

"I can't see any one," he answered, abruptly; "send her away, whoever she may be."

"She is here, sir," said the servant, in a confused way.

The intruder pushed past him, and entered the room.

"Anson Meredith," she said, "it is I—do not refuse to see me."

He started up, exclaiming:

"Eleanor! Eleanor!"

"Yes, yes, here at last!" she said, hurriedly.

She was deadly pale, and shaking from head to foot.

"Sit down," he said, gently, "you look very ill."

"Well now," she said, "I am well now."

"What has happened—what—oh, Eleanor, it was cruel to leave me ignorant of your movements."

"Anson!"

She sat down; a great joy shone through her pale face as she repeated:

"Anson, many years ago you adopted a child—a little girl; so young that she could know nothing of her own history—"

He made a surprised gesture, but she checked him.

"Listen to me—let me finish! You brought her up as your own—I thought she was your own. I think you loved her; I saw her here once. The child—the child! You know I was searching for mine. I have journeyed far, I have endured every thing—but I have found my child!"

A strange terror crept over his face. He did not try to interrupt her; he sat perfectly still, with that expression of pain deepening on his countenance.

"Call her," she said, rising suddenly; "quick—be quick. Tell her—Why do you look so—don't you understand? Anson, that child you took was mine—my little daughter!"

His only response was a groan. She caught his arm and clung to him wildly.

"What do you mean? Where is she? She is not dead—my child is not dead? Speak to me, Anson, speak to me!"

"Eleanor, that child left me a year since. She is married."

She fell back in her chair with an exclamation of thanksgiving.

"You frightened me so!" she said. "Where is she? Take me to her! Married or single, she is mine."

"I don't know where she is; I have never seen her since. She married a bad man—against my will—and I cast her off."

"Cast her off—my child!" she said, bitterly; "and you cannot tell me where she is? I demand her at your hands—give me my child."

He was startled at her agitation, and tried to calm her.

"You will easily find her," he said; "her husband is well known."

"What is his name?"

"He calls himself Montgomery. He is an actor—a celebrated one, if you think that betters it."

"He is my daughter's husband," she said. She paused suddenly, drew her hand across her forehead, repeating, "Montgomery—Montgomery—an actor. What did I read this morning? Where is the paper? Give me a morning paper!"

He took the paper from the table, and handed it to her. She looked hurriedly down the page, and cried out:

"It is the same! He is in prison; he has been arrested as a Northern spy—as a man dangerous to the rebel government!"

Meredith snatched the paper from her hand, and read the paragraph.

"In prison!" he exclaimed. "My God, my son—my son!"

She looked at him in a bewildered manner.

"You know him; you—"

"I tell you it was my son—disgraced, dishonored, for twelve long years, but still my own son—who married Mabel!"

"God help you!" she said, "you are more wretched than I."

He did not answer; he sat for a few moments stunned by the shock. Then he exclaimed:

"Let him go. I do not know him—he is no kin of mine!"

"Anson! Anson! I tell you he is my child's husband—he must be saved!"

"She chose her fate—I warned her of his character."

"And because she thwarted your wishes you cast her off! My poor child."

"You are mad, Eleanor; I bear no blame in this thing. Never was a man so wronged and outraged as I have been."

"You can tell that to a woman whose life has been what mine has—you, a man! What was your trouble compared to mine? Would I ever have disowned my child? If your son had been the most infamous

wretch that ever breathed, you should have clung to him—saved him."

"I did all in my power—"

"But my child—my daughter!"

"She has started for Richmond, where he has been playing."

"She is with her husband—her mother will go too. Oh, thank God, I have found her. I can aid her; she will love the poor unknown mother who has sought her so long. My child—my child!"

"God help me!" he groaned, "I have no child."

Eleanor laid her hand on his arm.

"As you value your soul's peace, save my child's husband! Put by this pride; it is unworthy. Come with me—he shall be saved!"

He shook off her hand, and said, coldly:

"You don't know what you are sayin', Eleanor. I believe that man to have been guilty of a paltry crime."

"No!" she exclaimed, "my daughter's husband would never commit a *crime*! If he was guilty, what matters it?—he is your son—yours—mine too, now."

All the strong pride of his nature rose up to aid the man then.

"I will not lift my finger," he said; "I do not know him. I will not go before the world and acknowledge that criminal as my son."

"This is cruel," she cried. "Twelvo years ago! Why he was a boy then—a mere lad."

"His very youth made the offense more hideous," he said. "Do not blame me till you hear all. His last act while with me was to committ a forgery; can you wonder when that came that I cast him off? He was sixteen years of age—older than most men of twenty."

"Are you certain that he was guilty?"

"There was not a doubt."

"Guilty of that, and her husband," she muttered.

"You may be certain that he was guilty."

"How readily you believe it," she exclaimed. "A boy might have committed even a fault like that, and still been reformed; you made no effort."

"It could not have been done, Eleanor; no mortal could influence him."

"But he was your son," she repeated; "he was your son."

"Even if he was, I could not consent to bear his disgrace."

"The old pride," she interrupted; "how well I recognize you there!"

Then her whole manner changed. She looked at him in an earnest, pleading way, and her voice would have gone straight to a heart even more firmly guarded than his.

"Anson, by the memory of that past—by all my suffering and my wrongs, I implore you to help me! Think what my life has been. There is one hope before me, will you not aid me to grasp it? Only put your pride away; no matter what wrongs you may have endured, they are not equal to mine, and I forgive. Your own son, Anson, your own! Think of him as a little child—would you have believed then that any crime or sin could have separated you from him?"

He made a gesture entreating silence, but she would not heed. She had taken his hands in hers—she was half kneeling before him, and even in the midst of his trouble and agony he was startled to see how much of the old look stole over her face when she spoke of her child.

"You do not care for the world now, Anson—neither its praise nor blame—we shall both soon be old. Oh, will you leave me childless?—for the blow that falls upon your son's honor will strike my daughter's heart!"

"Eleanor! Eleanor!"

"The old name—the dear old name! Oh, Anson, come with me—let them be happy! If you will not listen to your own heart, then for my sake, for the Eleanor of old, listen—oh, Anson! Anson!"

She turned abruptly away, and walked several times up and down the room, then as abruptly came back and sat down near him.

"Tell me if you loved my child," she said. "Oh, if you knew how sweet the word sounds now."

"Eleanor, I never dreamed till now that she was your child, or why my heart went out to her so tenderly. She was a little thing, who could not know her own history, but there was something in her voice that made my heart yearn toward her at the first sight. It was the old love for you, hewn down, trampled out, but starting up fresh and green in my affection for the child. I understand it now. Except yourself, Eleanor, I never loved anything as I loved that child."

"Except me! Did you, then, love me so much?"

"I loved you then, I love you now, better than my own life, better than my own soul."

The woman gave a faint moan, her form drooped, her eyes grew misty. She shrank away from him trembling and frightened.

"Now, Anson, now," she murmured; "and all that terrible mountain of disgrace rising between us. Both free, and yet so miserably chained."

"You will not refuse me again, Eleanor?"

"Again and again, Anson. If you turn from a son whose faults may have been only those of youth, how much more would my disgrace cling to you."

There was a great struggle in the proud man's heart. His bosom heaved, his eyes grew black with intense excitement.

"Eleanor, I will forgive him! For your sake, I will forgive him!"

She took his hand and kissed it; but when he would have drawn her closer, she shrank back.

All at once a flash, as of lightning, came to his face; he remembered Mrs. Eastman's package of papers. What if they indeed contained the vindication which would give the woman before him back

to life? He moved from her, and opened a cabinet. His hand shook as it turned the key. The papers rattled against each other as he brought them forth.

"Eleanor, my Eleanor, read these. They are Mitchell's papers, and relate to you."

She stood motionless. Something told her that her fate lay in those papers, but a misty darkness came over her vision, and she could see nothing.

"Read them, Anson, read them. I can not."

"Let us read them together," he said, tenderly. "Sit down by me, Eleanor, and we will read them together."

He drew her to a sofa, and sat down by her side. In one hand was the papers; the other rested upon the cushions that supported her. She did not observe it. Every faculty of her nature was in a wild tumult.

"Read—read!" she gasped.

He opened the first paper, and held it toward her. She pushed it back.

"I can not—I can not!"

The strong man grew ashamed of his thrilling nerves, and began to read. The paper had been hastily written; the sentences were abrupt, the language broken. It had been folded and sealed, but there was no address on the outside. In her eager haste, Mrs. Eastman had not observed this particular paper, and the seal was unbroken. What had she cared for the sister woman whose very life lay in the balance? But for her own selfish purposes the package would have rested still in one of her worn-out traveling trunks. Had she chanced to open the sealed packet, it would never have reached Eleanor Mitchell. It was addressed to Anson Meredith—that is, in the inside—while the entire package had Mrs. Mitchell's address upon it. The executor had not been able to find Mrs. Mitchell's address, and so it chanced that the package fell into Mrs. Eastman's hands, among other papers, after her husband's death. We have nothing to do with the other documents in the package; they are not necessary to an explanation with the reader.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIGHT IN THE NIGHT.

"ANSON MEREDITH," thus the paper ran, "I have hated you while living, but death is stronger than hate. When he commands, truth follows. I hated you, and why? For two reasons, the strongest that human nature has to give: You stood between me and my interests; you stood between me and the only woman I ever loved. We were cousins. Your mother was my father's sister. Her wealth, which should have gone into our family, for she had promised this, was, at the last moment, swept up by your father, and became yours. I hated you for this. By my aunt's injustice you became enormously wealthy. I was a pauper, for my father lost everything, and had no rich wife to fall back upon.

"We were much together, for you were not above patronizing a poor relation. Sometimes you were liberal, giving me money, and no doubt expecting gratitude. You never got that. I looked upon the hundreds you doled out, as my own. What call was there for gratitude?

"At the same time, and by the same person, we were introduced to Eleanor Nye. You loved her. I am not to this time sure that she loved you then. The creature was so shy and proud, that it was impossible to get at any secret of her heart. I think she did love you then. I am certain that she did afterward. But she was not for you. The property that should have come back to us you had; but that young girl—you never got her! That thought gives me a grim pleasure even now. I strive to conquer it, but can not. You made a confidant of me—why not? I concealed all the feelings that raged within me. You never dreamed of my love of Eleanor Nye till she became my wife. How was it done? This is the way: I found means to insinuate charges against you that would have made any woman shudder; such charges as no refined woman could speak of, even to ask an explanation. Not directly, but through such channels as were available. The poison worked. But you had enrooted yourself in her heart more firmly than I supposed. It took time and great ingenuity. Had you remained near her, nothing would have separated you. I managed that you should be compelled to go away. You will remember the time. You were engaged then; spite of all, she had accepted you. I smiled at that. You went, but was to write every week. You had obtained me a clerkship in the post-office. Your letters never reached the lady. I read them. Among my accomplishments was that of imitating almost any handwriting at sight. Yours was not difficult. I have a way of opening envelopes without harming them. The letters reached her in the right envelope, with the genuine postmark, but the contents were mine. She grew pale. I could mark the progress of my work, day by day, in the sadness of her eyes, in the mournful tones of her voice. At last the decisive letter reached her. You had changed—absence had proved how superficial was the passion which you had thought genuine. The love with which you loved another had convinced you of this. In another week you would be a married man.

"This was the letter which reached her. Poor wretch! her face haunts me now—so pallid, so like a wounded doe! Had I loved her less, or hated you less, that look must have disarmed me. But I went on. She was ill, very ill, for a time. I was near her. She seemed very grateful—so grateful that I, like a fool, thought that it was the love of a heart taken in the rebound.

"Just one month before you came home we were married. Poor girl! she had never got her strength, and seeing the passionate love which a word from her could turn into misery, remembered what she

had suffered, and so in gentle pity married me. This sufficed for a time, but love demands love. I was not a man to content myself with pity, so when the deep passion within me received no answer, I grew harsh and exacting. She bore it all in proud patience. You were at home again, but avoided her. To you she seemed treacherous, unworthy of a regret—to me she was coldly dutiful, still I loved her.

"At last, when we had lived together many years, she discovered the treachery of my conduct. I had forgotten to destroy your letters, and she found them. A terrible scene followed. You had been long married to a proud creature like her; no explanation was possible; root and branch, I had torn up her life.

"She left me. There was nothing in this that gave her a right of divorce, but her property had been secured to her by a wise guardian, and she had that power over me. I took her child, an infant then—we had lost one before that—hoping that the bereavement would bring her back. It wounded her to the soul, but she would not come, would not look upon me or speak to me.

"When I saw that nothing would do, that she had determined to ignore me forever, the evil that was in me arose firm and strong. She had resolved to abandon me. I would disgrace her. The haughty pride which lifted her far from my reach should be brought down.

"I sued her for a divorce. I brought that proud and sensitive creature into open court. I hired witnesses—plenty such can be found—to swear away her good name. The court did not believe them, the jury did not believe them, but a thousand newspaperers had sent the record abroad. I lost the case, but my object was accomplished. The haughty pride which had rejected me was ground to the dust. Yet that woman was as innocent of all wrong as the child I had wrested from her bosom.

"I say this to you solemnly, Anson Meredith, say it on my death-bed.

"My wife left the country, and went I never knew where. Twice she sent to inquire after her daughter, and her lawyer came to me about it, but I told him the child was dead. Times went hard with me after that, and at last I was driven to ask aid from you. It was awarded in the form of a clerkship. A clerkship from you to me! Oh, how I hated you! How that hate throve and took fresh bitterness every day!

"My child was an incumbrance to me, your son a blessing to you. Why was it, I asked, that you should be surrounded with wealth, and love, and honors, while I was poor and forsaken? The old story over again. Do what I would, the disproportion in our fortunes remained. I a bankrupt every way; you—. These bitter thoughts had their action too.

"Your son was a noble, manly youth, impetuous and rich in talent, but a child of prosperity; he was reckless, haughty and impulsive, also restive under restraint, wonderfully tenacious of his personal honor. His love for the proud father who gave him home and position was deep and true.

"I wanted money, and still thirsted for revenge. You will remember that I had a remarkable faculty of imitating any specimen of penmanship. It was a natural gift, improved by aimless practice. A dangerous gift, by which I had won the wife who had repudiated me.

"After imitating whole letters, it was easy to copy your name. It was I who forged that check. It was I who fastened the guilt upon your son. You had been in the counting-room that morning, and left a check on the desk. I was to draw the money, and meet some payment with it outside of the business. I quietly went to the desk, when no one was looking, and changed the genuine check for the one I had prepared for ten times the amount. Your son was going out—no one was near—I pointed to the check, and asked him to step down to the bank and draw it, as I was pressed with business. He did it. In twenty minutes I had the money in my hands. I cashed the original check, and paid the bill it was intended to meet.

"You remember the explosion. The charge of fraud against your son, his indignant denial, and expulsion from your house. The poor fellow had no means of explanation. The transaction had almost passed from his mind; such amounts were frequently drawn by the house. He had taken no great account of this one check, and his defense seemed like a subterfuge, his indignation like defiance. I had counted on this, and watched your stern agony with such gleams of joy as I had not tasted since my weddin-day.

"You had offered the boy money, which he rejected with heart-broken disdain. I sent him money—some of that money—and with a sense of aching wrong and unmerited disgrace at his young heart, he went forth into the world.

"What could he do? What can any young man, educated to expect a fortune, proud, sensitive, ardent, without trade or profession, do in a selfish world like this?

"He had genius, and I craftily led it into an exciting channel. His first idea of the stage came from me. He was too honorable, too upright—I could not make a villain of him, no one could have done that, but I made him what was sure to wound you almost as deeply, an actor. This satisfied me. I had no wish to injure the youth: it was not in human nature to dislike any thing so bright and good, but I knew that the greater his fame, the deeper your detestation of his profession. So he went his way into world, wounding you at every upward step.

"I had money now, and could shake off your mercantile patronage. You were a widower, childless, for the son's disgrace, secret as it was kept, killed

his mother. I saw you wounded to the heart. My work was done. But the child, always an incumbrance, what could I do with her? She was the sole link by which her mother might be drawn back, and must be cared for tenderly. A thought came into my head. You should be induced to take her under your roof. There she would be certain of protection and culture. I would keep proofs of her identity, and claim her or not at pleasure. I went to the good country people who had the child, and took her away. You were at your country place, mourning the dead—desolate, as they told me, and so miserable that I almost pitied you.

"It was a lovely moonlight evening, the dew fell heavily; the lawn around your house flickered with gleams of silver in the moonlight. Under the shadow of the great forest-trees on the left, I stood with the little girl. She had seldom seen me, and knew nothing of her mother. I told her, pointing to the great house gleaming in the moonlight, that it was her home—that a gentleman living there was her own father, who would love her dearly, and give her a great doll, and plenty of playthings, at which her bright eyes danced in the flickering moonlight, and she clapped her tiny hands in sudden glee.

"There was a light in the library window, which opened to the ground, and I saw you sitting within. I pointed you out to the child, and bade her go up to the window and knock on the glass, and call out—'Father, father, let me in!' She was a bright little thing, courageous and lovely as an angel. Thoughts of the doll had inspired her. With an eager laugh, she broke from my hold, and darted across the lawn. Her little feet sunk in the grass, and she went off noiselessly. An instant I saw them flitting over the gravel walk, then her fairy-like shadow darkened the window, and I heard a sweet voice cry out: 'Father, father, let me in.'

"You came to the window and opened it. I could see your face—it was pale and haggard—so haggard that I did not grudge the gleam of animation that came over it when you saw my beautiful child standing in the moonlight, with her golden hair afloat, and her pretty hands uplifted, calling you 'father.' I knew the word was a mockery, and so endured it.

"You took her in. I saw her sitting on your knee, and felt no pain when she held up her mouth to be kissed. It was an assurance of her safety and comfort. You were questioning her. I knew that, but it did not trouble me. What could she tell? That she had always lived with two old people who were not her parents, and that a man almost strange to her had brought her she knew not where. There was no disturbance about the house, and I conjectured that you had taken the little stranger in quietly, and would keep her without question or explanation. Satisfied of this, I went away, but came back to the neighborhood more than once to be sure of my child's fate.

"I was told that Mr. Meredith's little daughter had just been sent home from some distant relatives of her mother's, and that since her arrival the house had become more cheerful. She was a sweet child, they said, and a great comfort to the stricken man.

"I was free now to follow my wife. She should know that her child was alive, but never see it or learn of its whereabouts, unless her resolution to ignore my rights was given up. I went, but could not find her. She must have been traveling under another name. All over Europe I went, searching for her. Then to California, but in vain. I am dying now. In a little time all will be over. It has been a cruel sickness, and in the dim, sleepless nights I have had a weary time for thought, for repentance, remorse. During these long, long nights, I have written this. If it can undo any of the wrong I have perpetrated, may God speed it. Atonement I can not make. But I am alone here with my God, and He knows how my poor heart aches to set these things right. If my wife is ever found, tell her it was love more than revenge that urged me on to the crime that gave her to me. For my child—but I can not. My strength fails, the pain of coming tears aches in my eyes—I can no longer see the paper.

ELIJAH MITCHELL.

"Grass Valley, California."

The paper was read through, at first breathlessly, then with slow, cautious scrutiny. They did not speak much, for those two hearts, severed so long, trembled beneath the great joy that beat against them. They were so accustomed to restraints, that happiness crept back to them timidly. It was strange there.

But one great fact stood out luminous before them. That letter had lifted the black cloud of reproach from Eleanor's name. The friends she loved would cling to her from certain knowledge, not from faith alone.

Meredith folded the paper, and placed it under his vest near his heart. Then he drew her to his side, and looked down into her glowing face through a cloud of tears. They did not fall—many tears seldom go off in a heavy rain—but their brightness shone upon her with a holy illumination.

The mother's first thought was of her child. She clasped her hands with a joyous sob.

"He is innocent, all that is noble, this man who is your son and my daughter's husband."

"I have wronged him terribly—thrown him into a way of life full of temptations," said he, with pain in his voice.

"And if he has sometimes yielded to them, remember, Anson, who it was drove him forth."

"I will, Eleanor. Heaven knows how deeply I deplore my harshness now."

"You will go to him at once. You to your son, I to my daughter. No matter if war and danger block the way, what impediment can keep us back on an errand like this? Our children are in danger."

"I will go with you," he said, brokenly. "We

will make one great effort to reach our children, Eleanor. There is danger in that, but we will be together."

"Eleanor."

"Anson."

"Before we go on this journey which is to redeem your child and mine, there is one thing to be thought of—"

"What is it, Anson?"

"You and I must have a right to travel together before the whole world."

She began to shiver. His arm was around her, his cheek touched hers, yet she trembled like a girl.

"To-morrow," he said, "before we sail. Shall it be to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said, gently, "let it be to-morrow."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ANGEL IN THE PRISON.

In one of those miserable prisons which have festered up from the bosom of our country during the war, Charles Montgomery was confined. It was a dark, ill-kept room, gloomy and uncomfortable. The tramp of a military guard beat against the pavement outside night and day. The gloom of death hung about the young man. His engagement at the theater had been broken up. Hour by hour the excitement had increased, until even the theaters were deserted. All men breathed the fury of madness. Then the enraged mob began to cry for victims. Looking around, the actor was "spotted" as a Northern man. Though no word has escaped his lips, yet he was *felt* to be a Unionist. He was waited upon by a committee; but all the pride and determination of his nature came to his defense, and he only too fearlessly expressed himself to his inquisitors. The result was his arrest as a spy, though none better than his accusers knew how baseless was *that* charge. It sufficed, however, to make a Unionist feel the rebel power, and that gratified the rebel public.

But there were secret as well as public accusers seeking his ruin. Among the most dangerous of these was Mrs. Eastman, whose presence he had *not* sought, and whose perfumed notes he had left unanswered. Whatever folly previously may have possessed him, the last appeal of his wife had given him a new conception of his relations and responsibilities. He had begun to comprehend one cause of his wife's sadness, and loving her more dearly than ever since the birth of her child, his better nature awoke to the cruelty of his admiration of a woman so much her inferior. Perhaps the sacred influences of paternity had something to do with this, for, waking or sleeping, that lovely picture of Mabel and her child haunted him, as if she had been one of Raphael's Madonnas, and he a devout Catholic.

It was true, Mrs. Eastman had come to Richmond because at that time it held forth promise of a gay season, and, like many other ambitious women she hoped to profit by a state of war. Montgomery's engagement had been her powerful attraction; not that she meant any thing seriously wicked, but what trifle of heart she possessed really had been his long before his marriage with Mabel, and it was pleasant to absorb his attentions. That was all. Mrs. Eastman would have married Mr. Meredith without love. Indeed, the reader knows she had plotted for it, and done many contemptible things to accomplish it. But she would not have married Montgomery, had he been single, with love, because it was not in her nature to *sacrifice* any thing for another.

All this did not render her the less bitter against the young man when he came to Richmond, and visited the hotel every day without even calling on her. This woman was on intimate terms with many of the Southern chiefs. Montgomery was an impulsive, outspoken young man. He was arrested on the general charge of being an enemy of the South, and stood a fair chance of being summarily dealt with as a Northern spy. There was trouble in store, if not danger in this.

There was plenty of time to think of his young wife and her pretty babe, whom he might not see again. There was time for sad retrospection too. All the follies of a homeless and aimless life swept down upon him in a series of dark memories. A father himself, he began to think tenderly of his own father—to realize how undutiful his very independence had been. What was it, after all, this craving for applause, this hunger after excitement? Then came the recollection of his young wife, and that was the bitterest pang of all.

Filled with these bitter reflections, he heard the heavy bolts drawn back, the key turn in the lock, and a lady entered. Before he could move, her arms were about his neck, her voice crying, brokenly:

"My husband—oh, my husband!"

"Mabel—Mabel, how came you here?"

"I reached here last night. They told me every thing. I could not see you until this morning. How dreary it is here."

"Not now, Mabel."

"But you are innocent; you have done nothing."

"Before God I have not, Mabel. I love my country, and my whole country; *that* I have said, nothing more."

"Then we can bear it, Charles, we can bear it."

He was completely unmanned, and, as he strained her to his breast, the great tears fell like rain upon her upturned face.

"I did not deserve that God should send me such an angel," he said.

Mabel was the first to grow composed; this terrible blow, instead of weakening her, had brought out all the latent energies of her character, and she was prepared not only to comfort but to act.

"I have seen the commanding general, Charles," she said. "He will inquire into your case."

"Mabel, I have no friends here."

"Promise me one thing; may I send for my father?"

"He would not come, Mabel."

"He would—he would. He *must* be human."

"I tell you he will believe me guilty of some imprudence of word or deed—of any thing that will justify him in keeping away."

"But he will not think so. He is rich and powerful. Let me send."

"I would rather pass my life in prison, Mabel," he exclaimed, with a return of the old passion.

"For the baby's sake, husband. I left him asleep. Oh, if you could have seen him you would not hesitate. For the boy, Charles."

He did not speak. His chest heaved, his eyes dilated. Even in that moment of self-abasement he could have borne the most cruel sentence rather than have yielded.

"I can't do it, Mabel," he said, hoarsely, "I can't do it. Go away—leave me to my fate."

"Charles," she cried, "if you do this thing you will be a murderer. You will kill me and our child."

She pleaded, not wildly, but with a smothered passion that was more powerful than tears could have been. Before it the prisoner's stout heart melted—yielded as a great cloud passing away before the arisen sun.

"Mabel, one word before you send. This man is my father, *not* yours."

"What—what?" her eyes opened wide, her white lips partly slowly.

"He sent me from his house when I was a mere lad charged with forgery."

"But you were innocent?"

"As our child, Mabel."

"His child and I *not*! Driven from home! My husband! Oh, Charles, Charles, then I *will* send; he *shall* save you!"

He shook his head, but made no answer.

"And you can love me still so much as this, Mabel," he said, at length, "after all the grief I have caused you?"

"No, no," she broke in, "never that. I did not blame you. We shall be happy yet. You do love me, Charles."

"Mabel," he said, solemnly, "if I leave this place, my whole life shall be spent in proving it. I see myself now as I really am. No wonder God punishes me."

"You are not to think that—you must not. Only have patience—it will only be for a little time."

He did not cloud her hopes with further fears, but, as he looked at her, and thought how precious freedom would be, a still deeper gloom and despondency stole over him.

She remained with him for several hours, and only tore herself away then that she might see her babe, and by some messenger send away word for help in her great want.

When she had gone, he threw himself on his bed to wear out the long night as best he could, and count the hours that must elapse before her return on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXI.

A REVELATION.

MABEL hurried back to the hotel, and up to her room. She flung open the door, to behold two persons, a man and woman, bending over her child. They turned as she entered. With a cry she threw herself into Mr. Meredith's arms.

"Father, father!" She could articulate no more, and for the first time since the great calamity had come upon her, she fell down insensible.

When she came to herself, Mr. Meredith was bathing her forehead, while the lady held her in her arms. Mabel looked wonderingly in her face, and recognized the stranger she had twice before seen.

"Is it *you*, also?" she asked, faintly.

The woman made an impetuous movement, but Mr. Meredith checked her by a look.

"Are you better?" he asked. "Can you sit up, Mabel?"

"Yes, yes, I am quite well now. Father, you have come to save him—you have come to save him!"

"I have come to do all in my power, Mabel. To save him or to die with him!"

"Father, he was innocent. He never wronged you—never!"

Eleanor had released her child, and was leaning against the sofa, hiding her face in the cushions. She dared not look up lest she should shriek out the secret that was upon her lips, and Mr. Meredith had warned her how fatal the consequences of any sudden revelation might be in Mabel's state of excitement.

"Can you give me the particulars?" he asked.

She told him all that she knew.

"I will go at once," he continued. "Mabel, you must rest, for the child's sake."

"I will—I will," she said, with a return of her old manner. "I leave it all to you now. You can save him."

"I am certain that I can. I may have good news for you when I return."

She did not answer. She knelt down by her child, and they saw by the motion of her lips that she was praying. Neither stirred till she rose again. She was quite calm now, and went up to Mr. Meredith, and said:

"I can wait now; I am content."

Mr. Meredith saw Eleanor's appealing eyes upon his face; he knew the torture she was suffering.

"Mabel," he said, gently, "could you bear a surprise? It has nothing to do with Charles."

"Is it trouble?" she asked. "More trouble?"

"No, my child, joy and happiness."

Eleanor took a step forward, her eyes were fixed full on Mabel, but she did not speak.
"Do you know this lady, Mabel?"
"I have seen her twice; she was very kind to me."
"You owe it to her that I am here—"
"God bless her; but—"
"You never heard of your mother?" he said.
"No, no;" she looked wildly from one to another.
"Mother? What do you mean by speaking of her?"
"That is your mother, Mabel."

With a joy in which the wish of a lifetime found vent, Eleanor caught the young mother in her arms. No word was spoken for many moments; only low sobs from Mabel and murmurs from Eleanor disturbed the stillness.

"My mother—my mother!" Mabel at length mused.

"My child—my child!"

Mr. Meredith laid his hands upon theirs.

"And my wife, Mabel, my honored wife. Remember that, when you kiss her. She will explain everything to you, Mabel. I am going for Charles. You may hope now."

He went out and left them together. It was a full hour before they could talk, except in broken words full of love and tenderness. Then Eleanor, with her child close to her heart, told the story of her life, and Mabel began to realize that this great joy was not a dream.

"God is very good to me," she said; "so much new happiness when I thought that I was utterly deserted."

"There shall be no more trouble," Eleanor said. "Oh, we shall have happiness now. God will give it to us."

"He will save Charles, I know he will. Oh, mother, you must love him—he is so good, so noble. People may think him wild and reckless, but it is not true; he is so kind to me."

"Darling, I do love him. I trust in him. We will go away from every association of his old life. He will take back his father's name, and become the pride of his father's house."

"Oh, mother—mother!"

At these words the baby-boy woke, and lay regarding them with his great blue eyes full of a sort of vague wonder. Simultaneously they rose and bent over him, a new tide seemed formed between them from the maternal instinct in either heart.

"He is our child, mother," whispered Mabel, through a gush of tears that filled her voice with tenderness.

"And our grandchild," answered Eleanor, gathering the little fellow close to her bosom.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DIVINE CONSUMMATION.

CHARLES MONTGOMERY was sitting in his cell. Mabel had not, as yet, been near him that morning. He had lost the little glow of hope her previous day's visit had given him, sinking back into a despondency deeper from the temporary rise of spirits he had experienced at her coming.

"She is afraid to come," he said to himself. "She has only bad news. If she would only come and tell me. I'd rather bear the worst news than this suspense. Oh, Mabel—Mabel!"

As if in answer to his prayer, the door was opened, and Mabel rushed toward him, her eyes streaming with tears, but with such a joy in her face that it took his breath away.

"Mabel!" he gasped.

"You are saved!" she cried, "saved! Oh, my husband!"

He could not believe her words; he repeated them with a feeling of stunned surprise.

"Saved—saved!"

"They are here—all here," continued Mabel, quite forgetting the caution she was to have displayed.

"Who are here? What do you mean?"

"Your father. Shall I tell him to come in? Will you see him now, Charles?"

He could not speak. In the revulsion of feeling which came over him, it seemed as if his heart would burst.

Mabel went to the door and beckoned; in an instant Mr. Meredith was in the cell, followed by Eleanor.

Charles could not stir. His feet felt chained to the floor. There was an instant's pause, then the father and son fell into each other's arms, and, in the burst of repentance which each heart felt, all the old pride and sternness went out forever.

"My boy—my boy!" he exclaimed. "If you had only spoken at the time—if you had said you were not guilty."

"It was my folly and madness, father, I know that."

"No more than mine, Charles, but it is all over now. We will begin a new life from to-day, and this dear child shall be another bond between us."

He drew Mabel toward him, and Eleanor followed.

"See, Charles," Mabel said, through her tears, "this is my dear mother. She will love you for my sake. She is our father's wife, too."

Charles looked at them in speechless wonder. Mr. Meredith hastily explained the mystery, telling all in a few words, ending: "I know that she may be content in giving her child again to your care; you will be faithful to the trust."

"With God's help," he answered, fervently.

Eleanor laid her hand in that of her new-found son.

"You will not separate us?" she said. "You will come home, and let us live in the great flood of joy and peace which has at last crowned our way."

Mabel threw herself upon her husband's bosom.

"Will we not all go again to the dear old home?"

If there had been a lingering shadow of pride or disobedience, it vanished before the sunlight of those

tearful but beaming faces. Charles stood like one transported. His eyes seemed fixed upon the far away.

"Home!" he murmured, as over his fine features was diffused a smile which indeed seemed born of love and light. "I will go home; we will all go home; and we shall grow good and great, as God designed us to grow."

His words came slowly, distinctly, like one making a revelation to the invisible presences around him. Never, in all his career on the stage, had the actor wrought so divinely with words. It was a moment of joy, which must have thrilled the angels whose wings fluttered over that group, where Hates were buried and Loves were resurrected in great glory.

"I wonder how people feel who are unhappy?" said Mabel, one day, as the group sat on the deck of the steamer bearing them down James River, under the flag of truce, to the Union lines. "Trouble seems so far away now."

The young wife already was realizing in her dreams the years of peace which should bless her path and diffuse its rewards upon those she loved.

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